

Where Policy Meets Practice

Policy Updates and Emerging Challenges

Welcome!



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Inclusion

MentiMeter Word Cloud:

Share one policy topic (1-3 words)
that is top of mind for you in 2026.



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Session Overview



National Policy Developments



Workforce Pell

- **Expands Pell to short-term training** (8-15 weeks), allowing eligible IL institutions to offer federal aid to programs aligned to high-wage, in-demand fields beginning July 2026.
- Covers **career-focused, stackable credentials** in fields central to IL workforce needs, such as health care, IT, skilled trades, and advanced manufacturing.
- Programs must meet **strict quality metrics** (70% completion, 70% job placement, and a value-added earnings test).
- **Governors** lead approval work, IL agencies collaborating to inform implementation.
- **Department of Labor investing \$65 million** in community college development support
- Final **rules expected** April 2026.

→ Check out this [Workforce Pell Substack](#)



Federal Student Aid

- Reshaping **access** and **affordability**
 - New caps on Parent PLUS loans
 - Elimination of Graduate PLUS loan
 - New graduate loan limits
 - Changing classification of ‘professional’ degrees
- More restrictive repayment options, increased focus on collection
 - **Loan proration** for less than full-time enrollment
 - New **Repayment Assistance Plan** replacing Income-Driven Repayment Plan



Learn More: Illinois Federal Education Response Group

To keep up with ongoing shifts in federal policy, tune into the **Advance Illinois Federal Education Response Group** held virtually every three weeks.

Next call is March 13, 2026, 1-2:30 p.m.

→ [Register](#)

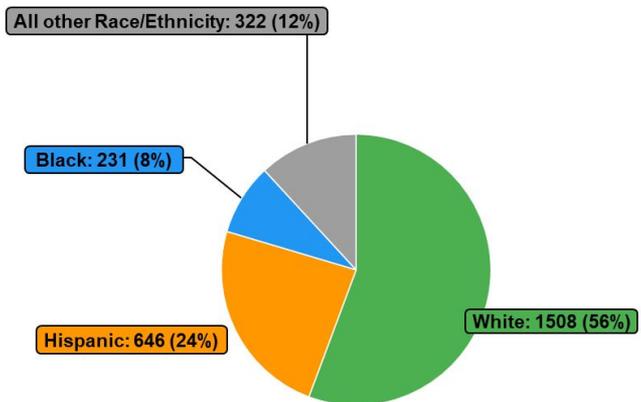


State Policy Developments



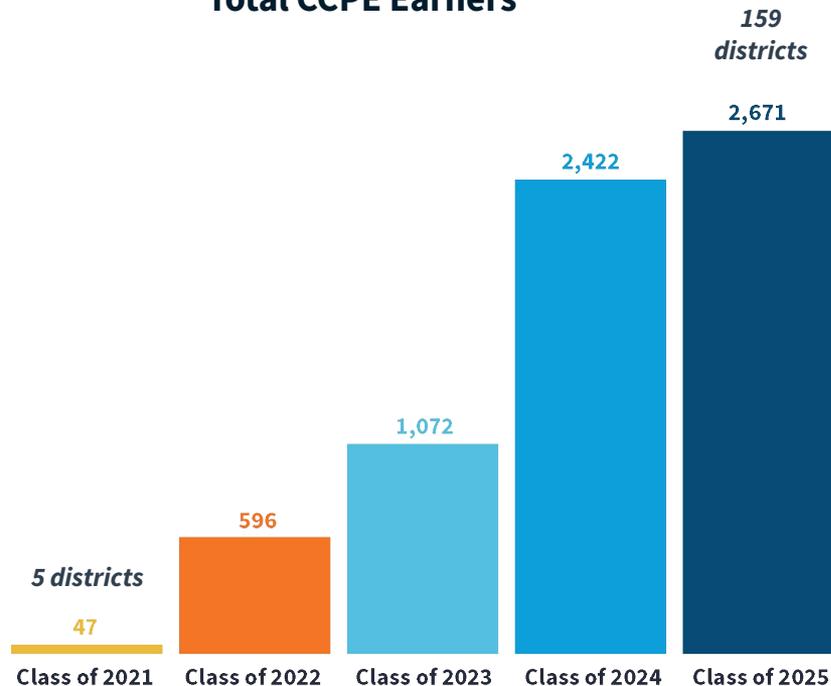
College & Career Pathway Endorsements

Class of 2025



[HB3296/Public Act 102-0917 Overview](#)

Total CCPE Earners



College & Career Pathway Endorsement Memos

**ILLINOIS EDUCATION AND CAREER SUCCESS NETWORK**

MEMO September 24, 2025

Addressing Challenges to College and Career Pathway Endorsement Implementation

From April through June 2025, the Illinois Education and Career Success Network Policy Committee convened a statewide working group of practitioners to uncover and address some of the most pressing challenges to College and Career Pathway Endorsement (CCPE) implementation in high schools across Illinois. The workgroup, comprised of more than 40 practitioners from varying geographies across the state, shared insights via written survey and workgroup discussions. CCPE's four-pronged framework, including individual planning, academic readiness, professional learning, and career-focused instruction provides students with a comprehensive suite of activities accelerating them forward in the pathways of their choosing.

The 2016 *Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Act (PWR Act)* ignited a statewide push to ensure students are ready for life after high school, introducing the Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PACE) framework, CCPE system, transitional instruction to reduce the need for postsecondary remediation, and a pilot of competency-based education models. Building on the PWR Act, *ISB2305* set a July 2025 deadline for districts serving any of grades 9-12 to apply to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to offer CCPE in at least one endorsement area or to opt-out by board decision. With this deadline for districts in mind, the Policy Committee convened a statewide workgroup of secondary, postsecondary and intermediary leaders to identify barriers to implementation and explore local- and system-level solutions. This report outlines the challenges the workgroup explored and highlights recommendations to address those core challenges.

Launched in December 2022, the Illinois Education and Career Success Network's *Policy Committee* provides space for local practitioners and policy leaders to collaborate and learn from one another, elevates local practice to inform Illinois state policy, and supports local practitioners in taking advantage of policy windows. Composed of a range of education, workforce, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and state agency stakeholders spanning the P-20 pipeline, the Policy Committee offers a useful venue for these conversations.

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**ILLINOIS EDUCATION AND CAREER SUCCESS NETWORK**

Local Practices to Support CCPE Implementation

In implementing College and Career Pathway Endorsements (CCPE), practitioners have innovated creative solutions to mitigate challenges in partnerships, operations, and student engagement. The local practices highlighted below arise from the collaborative problem-solving of a workgroup of the Illinois Education and Career Success Network Policy Committee.

Partnerships are challenging but form the basis of strong CCPE programming.

Challenge: Establishing and maintaining industry and postsecondary partnerships can be challenging in raising partner awareness, cultivating trust, and co-creating quality career development experiences for students.

Local Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A continuum approach allows for varying levels of commitment on employers' ends, allowing for low- and high-touch engagement options.Convene as a multi-stakeholder coalition to align on shared goals and vision for CCPE implementation.	Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Education continuumHealth sciences continuumIT continuumManufacturing continuumCareer Development Experience Toolkit
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Streamline operations across pathways by starting with what you have existing strength and capacity in and building from there.

Challenge: Operations, from funding to transportation and scheduling, are challenging for practitioners to master at the scale required to enable CCPE access for all students.

Local Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Streamline operations by creating district- or school-wide templates for team-based challenges or employer partnerships.Embed team-based challenges into 9th and 10th grade curriculum to ensure student access.Create school-based career development experiences where local employer partners may be scarce.With a new amendment to the Illinois Vehicle Code, consider using school buses as transportation for work experiences.	Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">School-based career development experiences
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Harness student engagement to spark pathway development.

Challenge: While CCPE experiences empower students to dream beyond the typical secondary experience and envision fulfilling college and career trajectories, these opportunities are currently limited to well-resourced districts and students therein.

Local Models: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Expand availability of student-centered currency to motivate and reward CCPE completers.	Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Student research of student-driven currencyCurrency examples
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In spring 2025, the Success Network Policy Committee brought together 40+ educators, administrators, and intermediaries to address a pressing challenge: expanding and strengthening CCPE in high schools statewide.

Illinois Perkins Model Programs of Study Guides

Purpose: Provide guidance and exemplars for local programs to adopt or customize as they develop a study for approval as part of the Perkins V Plan, including identifying priority dual credit courses and pathways for employer supports.

Recent Updates:

- Guides were updated in 2025
- [Companion Guide](#) created in 2025 to support local implementation
- Merging of [ICCB](#) and [ISBE](#) guides (beginning with education, health sciences, and IT) to:
 - Create one clear, aligned pathway system from high school to college and careers.
 - Improve coherence and coordination across high schools and community colleges.
 - Ensure pathways are consistently aligned to labor market demand and high-value creation.
 - Clarify and streamline dual credit and early college course sequences.
 - Strengthens Illinois' statewide strategy for college and career pathways and cross-agency collaboration.



Illinois' Dual Credit Quality Act (DCQA)



Overview

The DCQA codifies minimum requirements for dual credit partnerships and coursework:

- What secondary and postsecondary partners need to do to establish quality programs.
- Expectations around ensuring adequate access to different student groups (including students with disabilities).
- Communication of opportunities to stakeholders including students and educators.
- Created the [Model Partnership Agreement](#) to center students and guide local leaders in their partnership development.

June 2025 Amendment

- Emphasizes the importance of local partnerships as the first priority over non-local or out-of-state providers
- Sets a firm timeline and process for districts and community colleges to commence negotiations
- Creates a process for districts to appeal their partner college's decision to decline a course
- Extends Professional Development Plan eligibility indefinitely
- Creates a Dual Credit Committee composed of secondary and postsecondary representatives that will meet at least annually to improve accessibility, quality, and alignment of dual credit programs to meet the needs of students
- **Note:** New administrative rules are expected to be published for public comment imminently. These will outline expectations and processes for partnership development as required under the amended DCQA.

FY 2027 Budget Proposal

Proposed FY2027 Budget: *“Maintenance” budget, with largely flat funding*

- \$305 Million Increase for Evidence-Based Funding (EBF)
- \$51 million Increase in Mandated Categoricals (MCATs)
- CTE funding:
 - New: “Vocational Training Grant Program”
 - \$50 million for Area Career Center improvement
 - \$59 million (flat) for CTE
- Continued Dual Credit Funding
- 1% increase for Higher Education
- Flat funding for state scholarships (MAP, AIM High, Teachers of Illinois)
- Ongoing investment in teacher recruitment (Golden Apple and ISBE Teacher Vacancy grants))

104th General Assembly

Emerging legislative topics:

- Graduation requirements
- Pathways & employer engagement
- Community College Baccalaureate
- College admissions
- Evidence-based funding
- Higher Education Funding

Public Universities

- Chicago State
- Eastern Illinois
- Governors State
- Northeastern Illinois
- Northern Illinois
- Southern Illinois - Carbondale
- Southern Illinois - Edwardsville
- Western Illinois

Community colleges list:
oneclickadmit.org

**CLASS OF
2026**



**ONE CLICK
COLLEGE ADMIT**

The easy, stress-free way to be admitted to Illinois public universities and community colleges! Follow the steps below to start watching the admission offers roll in!



STEP 1
CREATE
your Common
App account & profile



STEP 2
SUBMIT
required info
like GPA & address



STEP 3
WAIT
for admission
offers



STEP 4
ACCEPT
an offer & start your
college journey!

IT'S THAT EASY!

Public Universities

- Chicago State
- Eastern Illinois
- Governors State
- Illinois State
- Northeastern Illinois
- Northern Illinois
- Southern Illinois - Carbondale
- Southern Illinois - Edwardsville
- U. of Illinois Chicago*
- U. of Illinois Springfield
- U. of Illinois Urbana-Champaign*
- Western Illinois

Community colleges list:
oneclickadmit.org

*Awareness and Outreach

**CLASS OF
2027**



**ONE CLICK
COLLEGE ADMIT**

The easy, stress-free way to be admitted to Illinois public universities and community colleges. No fees and no essays! Just complete the Opt-in Form and get ready to receive admission offers next fall!

How it works:

OPT IN

Fall of your **JUNIOR** year, your parent/guardian completes the Opt-In form, so you can participate in the program

MATCH

Your GPA is matched with the GPA admission requirements at partner public universities and community colleges.

RECEIVE

Fall of your **SENIOR** year, you will receive college admission offers right to your inbox.

ACCEPT

Accept offers from any university/community college you are interested in attending. **IT'S THAT EASY!**

Workshops & Resources



- Upcoming [Workshops](#):
 - Thursday, March 5th at 6 p.m.
 - Tuesday, March 10th at 12 p.m.
 - Wednesday, March 18th at 6 p.m.
 - Thursday, March 26th at 12 p.m.
- Video Overviews:
 - [Junior Opt-in Walkthrough](#)
 - [Parent Opt-in Walkthrough](#)
 - [Community College Opt-in Walkthrough](#)
- Visit the [OCCA resource page](#) to access:
 - A recorded informational webinar for counselors
 - Student FAQs you can share directly with juniors and families

Emerging Work



Launching New Work: A Comprehensive Look at Illinois High School Graduation Requirements

EdSystems is embarking on work to develop a comprehensive understanding of Illinois high school graduation requirements and identify stakeholder priorities in reevaluating them.

- Reach out to Madeleine (mgreene@NIU.edu) or join the March 11 Policy Committee meeting to learn more.
- Discussion: What are your experiences and priorities within existing graduation requirements?



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EdSystems Policy Agenda: Future Readiness

How do we anticipate the realities and challenges that will shape our future?

How do we design education and workforce systems that equip students not just to enter the world as it is today, but to adapt and thrive as it continues to change?

We address these questions in our [Policy Agenda Pillar 4 Blog](#).

Leadership, Governance, & Vision

As fundamental components of policy development and implementation, how do these elements shape what is achievable in Illinois? How can they drive equitable outcomes for students?

Student Experience & Conditions

How do students experience and navigate the P-20 pipeline? How are students faring overall, and how do they feel about it?

Policy Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

Are our policies driving the types of experiences and outcomes we intended? Do we have adequate data resources to examine equity in our systems, and do we have the capacity to use those data to drive continuous improvement processes?

Future Readiness

How do we anticipate the realities and challenges that will shape our world and systems in the future? How can we design systems that prepare students to adapt and thrive in evolving conditions?

Reports & Resources



Reports

Student Experience & Conditions

- Advance Illinois: [*The State We're In*](#)
- Partnership for College Completion (PCC): [Transfer Dashboards](#)
- Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative (IWERC):
 - [Learning Renewal: The relation between absenteeism and student learning in a postpandemic context](#)
 - [Precarious prospects: Education pays, yet socioeconomic disparities persist in Illinois students' later earnings](#)

Policy Evaluation & Continuous Improvement

- IWERC: [Promising pathways: College and industry routes to good jobs for Illinois youth from low-income families](#)
- [PCC's Second Progress Report on Reforming Developmental Education in Illinois](#)

Upcoming Opportunities & Closing



Success Network Policy Committee

Who? Local and statewide education, workforce, community-based organizations, advocacy groups, and state agency stakeholders spanning the P-20 pipeline.

What? Collaborate and learn from one another, elevates local practice to inform state policy, and supports local practitioners to take advantage of policy windows.

Upcoming Meeting: Wednesday, March 11, 9:30–11 a.m.

- Hear from a Success Network Leadership Community on efforts to integrate student voice into CTE programming.
- Student Advisory Council feature with student perspectives on CTE access.
- Timely state policy updates from the 105th General Assembly.
- Pending federal updates and impacts on Illinois.

Learn more and register for upcoming meetings:
<https://ilsuccessnetwork.org/policy-committee/>

Upcoming Events

March 11: Success Network Policy Committee Meeting (Virtual; [Website](#))

March 16: Success Network Webinar – Future Ready: Building Postsecondary and Career Awareness in Middle School (Virtual; [Website](#))

March 31: Developmental Education Reform Act Conference (Bloomington; [Website](#))

April 27: Success Network Webinar –Fostering Unity for Rural Education (Virtual; [Website](#))

May 6: ISBE’s Career Connections Conference (Normal; [Website](#))