

Illinois Community College Board

**WORKFORCE EQUITY INITIATIVE (WEI) PANEL DISCUSSION**

In fiscal year 2019, the Illinois Community College Underrepresented Report noted that across all minority groups in 2019, minority Career and Technical Education (CTE) program graduates accounted for 37% of completers. Among these, only 12% were African Americans. More than one-third (38.4 percent) of all degrees and certificates in fiscal year 2019 were awarded to minority students. While there was an increase in minority completions of 11%, there was still a decrease in African American student completions of 2%.

Public Act 101-0007 provided \$18.7 million dollars to respond to the increasing need to ensure workforce equity for African Americans in Illinois. The ICCB provided grant-funding to 15 community colleges in fiscal year 2020 to focus on improving workforce equity in at-risk communities. As a part of the Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI), African American participants must represent a minimum of **60%** of the total population to be served.

The grants purpose is to create, support or expand short-term workforce training opportunities in high-need communities focused on specific sectors with identified workforce gaps. The grant targets populations from “Disproportionately Impacted Areas”, including areas that have:

- a poverty rate of at least 20%;
- 75% or more of the children participate in the federal free lunch;
- at least 20% of households receive assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program;
- unemployment rates of more than 120% of the national unemployment average, for two consecutive calendar years; and/or
- high rates of arrest, conviction, incarceration, ex-offenders, gun violence, and low rates of home ownership.

Three Illinois Community Colleges: Illinois Central College (lead college), Chicago City College- Olive Harvey College and South Suburban College will share their experiences and successes in helping African American students enter and succeed in postsecondary education/training programs. These training programs must be on a career pathway leading to employment in high skilled, high wage, and in-demand occupations earning 30% above the living wage.