

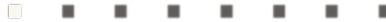
Illinois Community College Board

Workforce Education Strategic Plan

Lazaro Lopez, Ed.D.
Chairman

Karen Hunter Anderson, PhD
Executive Director

As the largest provider of public workforce training in Illinois, the system of 48 community colleges ensures that all Illinois residents have educational and training opportunities leading to high wage and high growth employment. Understanding and responding to the needs of the community is a core mission of the Illinois Community College System.



The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) engaged in a strategic planning process designed to ensure the community college system remains a leader in the complementary fields of workforce training and education, and becomes ever more responsive to changing employer and student needs throughout the state. This five year plan will expand and enhance Illinois' ability to attract, retain, and grow businesses and develop educational opportunities to support students' success in the workforce. It will also enhance the community college system's ability to accommodate the economic and workforce shifts occurring over the past two decades and into the future.

VISION

Utilize the overall strategic planning and related processes to achieve alignment of the community college system and the state's workforce development system with economic development directions and workforce needs, thereby creating a talent pipeline that fuels economic growth and creates career pathways for all citizens of Illinois.

The ICCB began the development of the Workforce Education Strategic Plan (WESP) in the Spring of 2015 with eleven regional meetings that were held in the state's ten economic development regions. These meetings included participation from community colleges, adult education and career technical education (CTE) providers, state agencies, employers, workforce entities, philanthropic and community organizations, community members, and others. Each regional meeting included an employer panel and dialogue with participants to discuss education and training needs as well as challenges identified by employers. Partner discussions and planning activities were focused around the following three areas:

- ❖ **Employer Engagement:** What can be done by the community college system, the workforce development system, and other partners in education and training to better meet the needs of employers, particularly those in high-priority regional industry sectors and clusters?
- ❖ **Talent Development System Alignment:** How can all stakeholders in talent development and workforce education and training better align and leverage their efforts to meet regional industry, employer, and occupational needs?
- ❖ **Education System Alignment:** How can ICCB, working with partners, best support individual community colleges and the college system in addressing the workforce preparation and education needs of regional employers in targeted industry sectors?

A synthesized written report of each regional meeting was published in August of 2015. These reports are available on the ICCB website at <https://www.iccb.org/workforce> .

As a result of the regional forums discussions, a taskforce identified four priority areas to be addressed as a part of the WESP for the community college system. These Strategic Direction areas are:

- **Strategic Direction ①: Increase Early Career-Related Education and Exposure**

Students need to be exposed to careers, on-the-job learning, and work much earlier. There was a clear consensus that career exposure, exploration, and work experience need to start earlier, in the K-12 system, and optimally at the elementary school level as well as in adult education and CTE related programs. The goal is to expand opportunities to explore a variety of careers and related programs of study, and to enhance core learning by teaching basic skills in the context of careers or jobs in which students might be interested.

- **Strategic Direction ②: Address Essential and Occupational Skill Gaps**

Employers want workforce and education systems to expand the pool of qualified applicants. They uniformly noted significant deficits in workers' (particularly young workers') "soft" or essential skills. Employers also want workforce partners to specifically address the sector and occupational needs of their industries.

- **Strategic Direction ③: Align Education and Training Programs to Employers' Needs**

Employers want education and training to be better aligned to their needs, standards and expectations and would be enthusiastic participants in effective collaborations focused on achieving alignment. Employers noted specific issues to help define the challenge including: (1) the need to specifically address the sector and occupational needs of industry, including career pathways and work-based learning; (2) the need for public systems to move at the speed of business; and (3) the need to address the disconnects in credentialing.

- **Strategic Direction ④: Strengthen Connections among Public Partners and Engagement and Alignment with Business**

There is a clear need to develop strategies that will strengthen each region's connections between and among community colleges, Adult Education, CTE, K-12 systems, and the workforce and economic development systems. Partnering with education and training providers and with economic and workforce development needs to be easier and more seamless for employers and must provide more value.

The ICCB Workforce Education Strategic Plan was approved by the Board in June 2017 and outlines the goals and objectives for each Strategic Direction to be addressed over the next five years. The plan will:

- ensure enhanced educational services and economic competitiveness for the college system at both the local and state levels;
- strengthen business and industry relationships;
- maximize employer engagement in the development of relevant programs that will lead to jobs and careers that offer family-sustaining wages;
- enhance education and training at all levels of the community college system including adult education, business and industry, career and technical education (CTE) and continuing education; and
- provide integrated options for students to move quickly into career pathway programs.



For questions contact: Matt Berry, Legislative and External Affairs Liaison, Matt.Berry@illinois.gov or Jennifer K. Foster, Deputy Director for Adult Education and Workforce, Jennifer.Foster@illinois.gov.