



## PRESS RELEASE

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**Workforce Equity Initiative (WEI), credentialing thousands of Illinoisans of poverty and color with a success rate more than double the national average, is praised by Statewide Leaders as a national model**

In December 2021, ICCB announced third year WEI funding and awarding \$18.7 million to 18 participating community colleges throughout Illinois. The Initiative focuses on improving workforce inclusivity by providing a credential and above living-wage job for adults of poverty residing in disproportionately impacted areas (low income, low employment, high crime). African American participants represent a minimum of 60 percent of the population served by the grant due to their underrepresentation in high-demand, high-wage careers. The end goal is for participating adults to secure full-time employment in a job paying at least 30 percent above the regional living wage.

With support from Governor JB Pritzker, Speaker Pro Tempore Jehan Gordon-Booth, the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus, and local legislators, funding of WEI allows participating colleges to credential adults in high-demand employment sectors experiencing workforce gaps including healthcare, manufacturing, construction, transportation, information technology, and emergency services.

Statewide this program has served over 6,500 residents producing over 6,100 credentials with a 62% completion rate and a 70% employment rate, more than doubling the national average completion rate for African American individuals.

"The last few years have brought education and employment challenges for our hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans, disproportionately affecting African American and other minority communities. Through WEI, participating community colleges have supported and scaled effective educational and career opportunities to help these targeted populations, enabling them to gain the necessary skills and credentials to earn above a living wage, a task that has always been a critical role for community colleges," said ICCB Executive Director Brian Durham.

"This program is tapping into a talented pool of individuals who are too often overlooked," Leader Jehan Gordon-Booth said. "I'm ecstatic about the positive results we have seen thus far, but more work remains. I am committed to helping residents receive the support and opportunity they deserve to pursue a good-paying career. When programs like this one succeed, all of Illinois benefits."

“The WEI grant allows community colleges to continue removing barriers to completing a credential for adults of poverty and African Americans from distressed communities,” said ICC (Illinois Central College) President Dr. Sheila Quirk-Bailey. “When adults earn credentials with labor market value, it not only changes the trajectory of their lives, but also the lives of their families; while strengthening the community, growing the workforce, expanding businesses and creating a more vibrant regional economy.”

The WEI model is proving to be a successful methodology for achieving outstanding enrollment, completion, and employment for African Americans and all participants of poverty outperforming Illinois and national performance data.

**The 18 colleges statewide achieved these collective outcomes:**

<b>Statewide WEI Outcomes - FY20 &amp; FY21</b>			
<b>WEI Goals</b>	<b>FY 20 Outcomes</b>	<b>FY21 Outcomes</b>	<b>Two-year Impact</b>
Participants	3,209 enrolled	3,323 enrolled	6,532
Credentials Earned	2,526	3,613	6139
60% AA Students enrolled	76% (2,429)	71% (2,345)	Exceeding goal
60% Completers	60%	62%	Exceeding Goal
60% Completers Employed	65%	70%	Exceeding Goal
Hourly Wage Target: 2019 (\$13.88) 2020 (\$16.08)	Average hourly wage of \$17.69	Average hourly wage of \$21.66	Exceeding Goal
Average Cost of Students Enrolled	\$5,565	\$5,227	

**Illinois Central College achieved these outcomes:**

<b>Illinois Central College WEI Outcomes - FY20 &amp; FY21</b>			
<b>WEI Goals</b>	<b>FY 20 Outcomes</b>	<b>FY21 Outcomes</b>	<b>Two-year Impact</b>
Participants	228 enrolled	233 enrolled	461
Credentials Earned	261	274	535
60% AA Students enrolled	74% (169)	74% (172)	Exceeding goal
60% Completers	62%	60%	Exceeding Goal
60% Completers Employed	62%	72%	Exceeding Goal
Hourly Wage Target: FY20 \$14.26 FY21 \$17.59	Average hourly wage of \$17.95	Average hourly wage of \$20.33	Exceeding Goal
Average Cost of Students Enrolled	\$5,263	\$5,150	

**Comparative Outcomes:** Nationally, of students who start college at a community college, 41% of students have earned a postsecondary credential in 6 years. The comparable rate for African Americans is 29% (AACC, July 2020). **WEI students have a 62% completion rate (33 points higher) and more than twice the national average, which was achieved in a one year or less.**

“Community colleges play a vital role in the economic health of our region,” said Heartland Community College President Dr. Keith Cornille. “Offering the targeted support funded by the WEI grant, institutions such as Heartland and ICC connect individuals with the kind of educational opportunity that leads to a good job, and eventually a career. By engaging with our community partners and local industry, we are not only working to close educational attainment gaps but also helping provide a vital pipeline to the workforce.”

In FY2020, WEI was successfully administered by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and led by Illinois Central College with 15 participating colleges: College of Lake County, Illinois Central College, Joliet Junior College, Kennedy-King College, Lincoln Land Community College, Malcolm X College, Olive-Harvey College, Parkland College, Prairie State College, Richland Community College, Rock Valley College, South Suburban College, Southwestern Illinois College, Triton College, and Wilbur Wright College.

This year participating WEI colleges expanded to 18 colleges including College of Lake County, Heartland Community College, Illinois Central College, Kaskaskia College, Kennedy-King College, Lincoln Land Community College, Malcolm X College, Oakton Community College, Olive-Harvey College, Parkland College, Prairie State College, Richard J. Daley College, Richland Community College, Rock Valley College, South Suburban College, Southwestern Illinois College, Triton College, and Wilbur Wright College.

For more information about the statewide Initiative, visit [illinoiswei.org](http://illinoiswei.org). For local information on WEI at Illinois Central College, visit [icc.edu/wei](http://icc.edu/wei).

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