



FILED
INDEX DEPARTMENT
MAR 13 2026
IN THE OFFICE OF
SECRETARY OF STATE

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

March 13, 2026

Executive Order 2026-03

EXECUTIVE ORDER ESTABLISHING A STATE ATTAINMENT WORKING GROUP

WHEREAS, in 2009, the Illinois P-20 Council adopted a statewide postsecondary attainment goal that 60 percent of adults would hold a high-quality postsecondary credential by 2025; and,

WHEREAS, according to the most recent data available, approximately 57% of Illinois adults currently hold a postsecondary degree or credential, up from 41% in 2008; and,

WHEREAS, workforce projections indicate that by 2031, more than 70% of all jobs will require education or training beyond high school; and,

WHEREAS, a recent study by the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative found that disparities remain in access to good jobs, even with a similar degree, program of study, or industry across race, income, and gender, but higher education shrinks these gaps; and,

WHEREAS, through strategic investments and policy decisions, Illinois has made significant progress in expanding college access and workforce training opportunities across the State; and,

WHEREAS, fall 2025 marked the highest total enrollment in Illinois public universities in 10 years, and the fourth consecutive year of growth in enrollment for Illinois community colleges; and,

WHEREAS, since 2019, Illinois has significantly expanded college affordability, bringing funding for the Monetary Award Program (MAP) to \$721 million in Fiscal Year 2026, an increase of \$320 million, and doubling funding for the AIM HIGH Grant Program to \$50 million; and,

WHEREAS, the combination of MAP and Pell Grants allows virtually every recipient at or below the median income in Illinois to attend community college tuition-free; and,

WHEREAS, the share of in-state undergraduate students at public universities paying no tuition and fees has risen from 24% in Fiscal Year 2018 to 44% in Fiscal Year 2025; and,

WHEREAS, through Rebuild Illinois, the State has invested \$42.3 million to build and expand manufacturing training academies at community colleges in central and southern Illinois, including Heartland Community College, Southwestern Illinois College, Kankakee Community College, and Richland Community College, with additional expansions underway; and,

WHEREAS, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) establishes the federal framework for Illinois' workforce development system, helping over 25,638 dislocated workers, adults, and youth address barriers to career pathways and credential attainment; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Works Pre-Apprenticeship Program, launched in 2021 with the goal of increasing diversity and access to apprenticeship programs in the construction trades, has graduated more than 3,900 Illinoisans through the program; and,

WHEREAS, since its launch in 2019, the Workforce Empowerment Initiative has served more than 15,000 adults, expanding access to training opportunities and supportive services for individuals experiencing poverty, enabling them to pursue careers paying at least 30 percent above the living wage in high-demand fields such as health care, transportation, information technology, construction, and education; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Vocational Rehabilitation Program, which serves Illinoisans with disabilities in achieving independence through gainful employment, provided over 38,000 participants with career and educational training in Fiscal Year 2025; and,

WHEREAS, the Illinois Department of Corrections and its partners provide individuals in custody with education, vocational training, and other preparation to enter the workforce. In 2024, more than 53,000 individuals in custody participated in Adult Basic Education or Advanced Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, college degree programs, vocational education, or webinars with community-based workforce partners; and,

WHEREAS, the Employer Training Investment Program provides resources directly to the employer community to support structured job training programs and job skill enhancement opportunities, and in 2024 the program supported training for 68,407 workers across Illinois; and,

WHEREAS, in 2026 Illinois was named the number one leader for workforce development in the Midwest region by Site Selection Magazine; and,

WHEREAS, while Illinois has made significant strides in expanding access to postsecondary opportunities, it must focus efforts to keep pace with projected workforce needs and address persistent racial, regional, and socioeconomic disparities in attainment of high opportunity credentials, employment, and income; and,

WHEREAS, the rapid evolution of artificial intelligence is reshaping workforce demands and creating new opportunities and risks for workers and learners; and,

WHEREAS, Illinois' future prosperity depends on a skilled, adaptable workforce that meets the evolving needs of employers and supports inclusive economic growth; and,

WHEREAS, achieving these outcomes requires coordinated action across multiple State agencies, institutions, and organizations, each with distinct but complementary roles in expanding access to education and training, strengthening career pathways, and advancing economic mobility for learners and workers throughout Illinois;

THEREFORE, I, JB PRITZKER, Governor of Illinois, by virtue of the executive authority vested in me by the Illinois Constitution and the laws of the State of Illinois, hereby order as follows:

Section 1. Establishment of a State Attainment Working Group

A State Attainment Working Group ("Working Group") is hereby established in the Office of the Governor to recommend a state attainment goal for postsecondary degrees and credentials of value to the Governor by December 1, 2026. In developing its recommendation, the Working Group shall:

- A. Conduct a comprehensive review of existing state and regional education and workforce plans, including: A Thriving Illinois, the Illinois 5-Year Economic Growth Plan, the Perkins V State Plan, the WIOA Unified Plan, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training state plan, Illinois Multi-Sector Plan on Aging, college

- and university strategic plans, regional workforce plans, and other relevant state plans and reports;
- B. To the greatest extent possible, ensure alignment with existing State efforts, including implementation of Workforce Pell and career and technical education;
 - C. Create and implement a plan for engaging local workforce boards, postsecondary institutions, Illinois economic development organizations, employers, employer associations, industry leaders, labor unions, students, higher education advocacy and research organizations, and community-based organizations to ensure broad representation and cross-sector alignment;
 - D. Analyze national, state, and local data, and other resources as appropriate, to identify current and projected state and regional workforce trends and needs through 2040;
 - E. Assess the levels and types of postsecondary degrees and credentials of value, including non-degree credentials, that will be required to meet projected workforce needs at state and regional levels;
 - F. Define credentials of value in a manner that, at a minimum, considers alignment with current and projected labor market demand, the economic return of a credential, and its potential to support economic mobility for learners and workers;
 - G. Identify the gap between projected workforce needs and projected levels of attainment of degrees and credentials of value in the state and by region; and
 - H. Submit findings to the Governor and recommend a statewide postsecondary attainment goal for 2040 focused on degrees and credentials of value that align with state and regional workforce needs, promote economic mobility for Illinoisans, and seek to eliminate educational and economic disparities. The findings should include conclusions from the landscape analysis, the Working Group's process for developing the recommended goal, and the feasibility and value of establishing regional, institutional, and/or disaggregated goals for growth in attainment.

Section 2. Working Group Membership and Responsibilities

A. Working Group Membership

The Working Group will consist of representatives, selected by the Governor, from the following:

- 1. Education and Workforce Members
 - a. Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)
 - b. Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)
 - c. Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES)
 - d. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)
 - e. Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)
 - f. Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)
 - g. Representatives of the Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (IWIB).
- 2. Advisory Members
 - a. Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)
 - b. Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC)
 - c. Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)
 - d. Representative of the Office of the First Lady
 - e. Other agencies as determined by the Governor's Office.

B. Leadership and Administrative Responsibilities

DCEO, ICCB, IBHE, and IDES shall serve as co-chairs of the Working Group and provide administrative, logistical, and professional staff support for the operation of the Working Group.

C. General Responsibilities of Working Group Members

Each agency participating in the Working Group will:

1. Designate a senior representative to participate in the Working Group;
2. Provide staff support for the Working Group, including access to relevant data and analytical capacity, as appropriate; and
3. Assist in the development of the Working Group's findings and recommendations as described in Section 1(H).

The Working Group may work with subject matter experts and consultants to support the execution of this order.

D. Advisory Member Responsibilities

1. Illinois Department of Human Services

IDHS shall advise the Working Group to ensure that recommendations reflect the needs of individuals facing economic and social barriers and are informed by the administration of human services programs that support education and workforce participation.

2. Illinois Department of Corrections

IDOC shall advise the Working Group on the implications of proposed credential definitions and attainment goals for individuals who are incarcerated or justice-impacted.

3. Illinois Department of Public Health

IDPH shall provide analyses of population data and demographic trends to support the Working Group, including projections of demographic changes that may affect workforce demand, educational participation, and equitable access to postsecondary opportunities across regions of the state.

4. Office of the First Lady

The Office of the First Lady shall designate a representative to advise the Working Group and to ensure that its recommendations are informed by its efforts to advance the well-being, economic security, and educational and workforce opportunities of women across Illinois, including women who face systemic barriers, such as justice involvement.

Section 3. Data Sharing

Participating agencies shall, to the maximum extent possible, expedite data sharing agreements to support the efforts of the Working Group. Such activities shall explicitly prohibit state agencies from imposing any fees or charges for data matching or exchange with other state agencies.

Section 4. Term of the Working Group

The Working Group shall be dissolved upon submission of its report to the Governor, subject to renewal by a succeeding Executive Order.

Section 5. Savings Clause

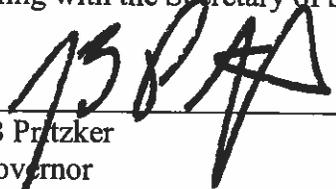
Nothing in this Executive Order shall be construed to contravene any federal or State law or regulation. Nothing in this Executive Order shall affect or alter the existing statutory powers of any state agency.

Section 6. Severability

If any provision of this Executive Order or its application to any person or circumstances is held invalid by any court of competent jurisdiction, this invalidity does not affect any other provision or application of this Executive Order which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application. To achieve this purpose, the provisions of this Executive Order are declared to be severable.

Section 7. Effective Date

This Executive Order shall take effect immediately upon its filing with the Secretary of State.



JB Pritzker
Governor

Issued by the Governor: March 13, 2026

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