

For Immediate Release

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Diverse Stakeholders Across Illinois Commit to Addressing 29% Drop in Black Student Enrollment in College

Illinois state-wide group of corporate, public, and community leaders, convened by Chicago State University, release an Action Plan that addresses systemic issues that result in enrollment and completion gaps for Illinois' Black students

ILLINOIS—In the wake of a 29% drop in enrollment of Black students in Illinois' higher education system since 2013, documented by the Illinois Board of Higher Education, over 40 cross-sector leaders from throughout the state created an Action Plan for addressing the crisis facing Illinois' education and employment sectors.

Equity gaps for Black students persist at every step along the path into and through college and into employment in Illinois. The gaps are stark. Beyond the disparity in high school completion, only half of Black graduates will enroll in postsecondary education due to a lack of critical support structures. Of those who enroll, only 36 percent will graduate, and even fewer will secure a job that pays a living wage after graduation.

To tackle the challenges that face Illinois' Black students, and to ensure a diverse and robust workforce, a collaborative of multi-sector stakeholders came together to knock down barriers and address policies deeply rooted in racism. The Equity Working Group (EWG) has identified critical actions needed to close equity gaps and enable Black students, families, and communities to thrive and survive in Illinois. These actions are detailed in the "*Equity Working Group for Black Student Access and Success in Illinois Higher Education*" Action Plan released on May 24th.

"Illinois has stood on the sidelines as Black student enrollment and success rates have declined," said Zaldwaynaka ("Z") Scott, Esq., President, Chicago State University. "Today, the Equity Working Group lays out a comprehensive roadmap for reform through collaborative cross-sector leadership that ensures Black students can access and thrive in Illinois' higher education system."

The Equity Working Group is composed of stakeholders from across sectors and across the state, including the Illinois Board of Higher Education, members of the Illinois General Assembly, employers, philanthropy, public and private colleges and universities, and community and non-profit groups such as Women Employed, the Partnership for College Completion, and the Chicago Urban League. The Civic Consulting Alliance provided both strategy and project management support. Working sessions were facilitated by an experienced team from HCM Strategists made possible with support provided by the Lumina Foundation.

The Equity Working Group is co-chaired by President Zaldwaynaka (“Z”) Scott of Chicago State University, Illinois 17th District Senator Elgie Sim, Jr., Mr. John Atkinson (Executive Vice President and Managing Director of Willis Towers Watson and Board Chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education), and Ms. Karen Freeman-Wilson (President and CEO of Chicago Urban League).

EWG members have recommended data-driven actions and solutions for each sector, including PreK-12 education systems, 2 & 4 year colleges and universities, community organizations, philanthropy, the private sector, and the State to drive systemic and institutional change.

“When diversity is welcomed, it’s a proven and game-changing advantage,” said AT&T Illinois and Great Lakes States President Eileen Mitchell. “We know this, because the Black community has consistently enriched our company, our products and our people. There is more work to do, of course, and we’re committed to tackling it to ensure we live true to our value to stand for equality.”

The work of the Equity Working Group will continue through Chicago State University’s newly launched *Center for Education Equity* housed within its Illinois Innovation Network hub, the *Institute for Solutions of Urban Populations*.

Download the report: https://www.csu.edu/provost/equity_working_group.htm

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ABOUT CHICAGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Chicago State University (CSU), founded in 1867, is the oldest public university in the Chicago Metropolitan area. The University’s five colleges offer over 70 undergraduate and graduate degree-granting and non-degree programs. CSU is committed to equity in education, serving as the only U.S. Department of Education-designated four-year Predominantly Black Institution in Illinois and ranked by a Harvard economist in the top 4% of public and private universities nationwide in supporting our graduates’ economic mobility. The University serves as a prominent civic space on the greater South Side of Chicago by hosting a multitude of athletic, educational, cultural, and recreational activities. The University is located near public transit that provides convenient access to the campus.