



CHANCELLORS REPORT

August 15 – September 11, 2026

Opening Reflections

My first several weeks as Chancellor have been intentionally focused on listening, learning, and developing a deeper understanding of IECC – its people, colleges, history, organizational structure, opportunities, and challenges. During this reporting period, I visited all four IECC colleges and our Mining and Industrial Training facilities, met individually with each member of the Board of Trustees, spent time with members of the administrative team, and participated in several institutional, employee, student, and community conversations.

These experiences have reinforced something I believed coming into the position: *IECC has considerable strengths upon which to build*. I am particularly impressed by the commitment of our employees, the pride people have in their colleges and communities, and the positive experiences described by many of the students I have met. At the same time, I am beginning to hear recurring questions and themes that warrant additional exploration. At this stage, I view those as *questions to understand* rather than *conclusions upon which to act*.

This Chancellor's Report will become a recurring monthly communication intended to provide the Board of Trustees **and the broader IECC community** with a transparent view of institutional performance, significant activities, strategic progress, emerging issues, and areas of focus. Future reports will include recurring enrollment and financial-performance information as I become more familiar with IECC's information systems, reporting practices, and underlying data.

As I begin this work, I want the report to do more than chronicle activity. My goal is to provide context: *what we are seeing, why it matters, what we are learning, and where our attention may need to turn next*. During these first several months, that will necessarily include more questions than conclusions as I continue listening, testing assumptions, and developing a fuller understanding of IECC.

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Listening and Learning Across IECC

A significant portion of my first month was spent visiting our colleges and learning directly from the people who teach, support, and serve our students. I completed full-day visits at FCC, LTC, OCC, and WVC. I also visited IECC's Mining and Industrial Training operations at Southeastern Illinois College in Harrisburg and the John A. Logan College facility in West Frankfort. These visits have included conversations with students, faculty, staff, coaches, administrators, Foundation representatives, and others connected to our colleges.

My purpose in these visits has not been to conduct evaluations or arrive at immediate conclusions. Rather, I have tried to listen, observe, ask questions, and better understand each college's history, culture, strengths, challenges, and relationship with IECC. Each college has a distinct identity and serves communities with different needs, yet several themes are beginning to connect across my conversations.

People and Students. My strongest impression continues to be the commitment of our people and the quality of the relationships they have developed with students. I have encountered employees who care deeply about their colleges and take considerable pride in helping students succeed. Just as importantly, the students I have met have generally been positive, engaged, and appreciative of the people who support them. At OCC, for example, I was particularly impressed by students' descriptions of their relationships with advisors and by their willingness to engage thoughtfully in conversations about their education, technology, communication, and the future. As we consider opportunities for improvement, protecting and strengthening these student-facing relationships should remain central to our work.

Academic and Workforce Identity. My visits have also caused me to think more deeply about the academic and workforce identity of each college and how those identities collectively contribute to IECC. I have seen impressive investments in academic and workforce facilities, programs with considerable potential, and areas where facilities or program offerings may no longer fully reflect current or future needs. These observations reinforce the importance of first understanding what programs and services our colleges need to provide in the years ahead and then aligning facilities, equipment, staffing, and other resources in that direction. Put simply, our facilities and resources should support our academic and institutional strategy rather than determine it.

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Organizational Clarity and Capacity. Through several conversations, I have heard questions about roles, responsibilities, supervisory relationships, workload, communication pathways, and where particular decisions should be made. Some of these questions appear connected to organizational changes IECC has made in recent years; others may simply reflect the inherent complexity of operating four colleges across a large geographic region. I am particularly interested in understanding whether responsibilities and decision-making authority are sufficiently clear and whether employees have the capacity and support necessary to carry out the work assigned to them. My OCC conversations, for example, highlighted some of the practical challenges associated with geographically dispersed supervision and with simultaneously carrying campus and systemwide leadership responsibilities.

One IECC and Four Colleges. Closely related is an important question I expect to continue exploring: what should it mean to operate as one IECC while preserving the strengths and responsiveness of four distinct colleges? There is considerable value in common standards, coordinated academic planning, consistent processes, shared systems and resources, and collaboration among our colleges. At the same time, operating as “*one institution*” does not necessarily require every operational decision to be made centrally. Finding the appropriate balance between systemwide coordination and effective local execution will be an important part of my continued learning.

Communication and Understanding the “Why.” Finally, communication has surfaced repeatedly. Effective communication requires more than distributing information about what is changing or explaining how a new process works. Employees are better positioned to engage productively with change when they *understand the problem being addressed, why a decision is being considered, and how the change is expected to improve the organization or the student experience.* As we continue implementing prior changes and eventually consider new ones, I believe we can become increasingly intentional about communicating that “*why*” and closing the communication loop.

These themes are initial observations, not conclusions. I have now spent meaningful time at each of our colleges, but I am still early in the process of understanding IECC and have seen many issues from only a limited number of perspectives. My intention over the coming months is to continue listening, test what I think I am hearing against additional perspectives and data, understand why current structures and practices developed as they did, and resist moving prematurely from observation to solution.

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Building Relationships and Understanding IECC

Another priority during my first month has been developing relationships with the people responsible for governing and leading IECC. Organizational charts, policies, and reports can provide important information about an institution, but they cannot fully explain its history, culture, relationships, or the experiences that have shaped current practices. Much of my initial work has therefore involved simply getting to know people and learning from their perspectives.

Board of Trustees. During the reporting period, I completed individual “*Meet and Greet/Get to Know*” sessions with each of IECC’s seven Trustees. These conversations provided an opportunity to learn more about each Trustee’s background, connection to IECC and the communities we serve, perspectives on the institution, and expectations for our working relationship. They were also helpful in beginning to understand the history behind some of IECC’s current practices and priorities.

I came away from these conversations appreciative of the experience and institutional knowledge represented on the Board and of the commitment Trustees demonstrate to IECC and its four colleges. Establishing a strong Chancellor–Board relationship will remain a priority for me, grounded in open communication, mutual trust, clear roles, and ensuring Trustees have the information necessary to carry out their governance responsibilities effectively.

Administrative Leadership and Support. I also completed individual introductory sessions with several members of IECC’s leadership and support team, including Chief Information Officer Paul Tait, Chief Financial Officer Ryan Hawkins, Director of Human Resources Andrea McDowell, Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Dr. Cathy Robb, and Executive Assistant to the Chancellor Sheryl Childers. These conversations have helped me better understand their areas of responsibility, current priorities, organizational history, and perspectives on opportunities and challenges facing IECC.

Although these meetings naturally touched on individual functional areas, their greater value has been helping me understand how the pieces of IECC fit together. As I continue meeting with leaders and employees throughout the organization, I am particularly interested in understanding where responsibilities intersect, how information and decisions move across the institution, and how we can best support the people responsible for carrying out the work.

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Legal and Labor Relations. I also met with labor counsel James Powers and Kelly Coyle to become better acquainted with IECC's collective bargaining history, current labor-relations environment, and relevant legal matters. This background is important as I begin developing relationships with faculty leadership and preparing for future collective bargaining. My goal is to approach those relationships with a clear understanding of the institution's history while remaining focused on building productive relationships for the future.

Taken together, these conversations represent an important part of my orientation to IECC. I am intentionally seeking perspectives from people with different responsibilities and experiences rather than relying on any single account of the institution. Over time, those perspectives (combined with institutional data, direct observation, and continued engagement with employees and students) will help me develop a more complete understanding of where IECC has been, where it is today, and where opportunities may exist for the future.

Strategic and Operational Planning

During the reporting period, I participated in my first Strategic Engagement Planning Council (SEPC) Operational Planning Retreat and regular SEPC meeting. These experiences provided an important introduction to IECC's planning processes and to the role SEPC plays in bringing together leadership from across the institution.

IECC has already invested considerable effort in establishing strategic priorities and developing an operational planning process intended to translate those priorities into institutional action. My immediate goal is not to redesign that work, but to better understand the process, the terminology being used, how priorities are established, how responsibility is assigned, and how progress is measured and communicated.

As I become more familiar with the process, I am particularly interested in strengthening the connections among strategic priorities, operational planning, resource allocation, measurable outcomes, and accountability. An effective planning process should help us answer several relatively straightforward questions: *What are we trying to accomplish? Why does it matter? What actions are necessary? Who is responsible? What resources are required? How will we know whether we are making progress?*

My early experience with SEPC has also caused me to think about its broader role within IECC. I believe the Council has the potential to serve as an important institution-wide leadership forum ...not simply as a place where information is presented or individual items are processed, but as a venue for thoughtful review, coordination, communication, and discussion of issues that affect multiple areas of the institution.

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Related to that work is a broader question regarding governance and decision-making. As I continue learning IECC, I want to develop greater clarity regarding how an idea moves from identification of a need, through appropriate consultation and review, to a decision, implementation, and ultimately communication back to the people affected. Clear processes do not eliminate disagreement, but they can help employees understand how decisions are made, where they have opportunities to contribute, who is ultimately responsible for deciding, and what happens next.

These are areas I expect to explore with SEPC and others during the coming months. As with other aspects of my transition, my immediate priority is to understand and strengthen the systems already in place before determining whether more significant changes are necessary.

FY27 Budget and Institutional Performance

During this reporting period, IECC completed work on the FY27 budget for presentation to the Board of Trustees. The final budget projects an operating deficit of approximately \$2.0 million (both Fund 1 and Fund 2). While IECC enters the year with strong fund balances and has the financial capacity to absorb the projected shortfall, the budget also highlights an important longer-term issue: ***recurring operating expenditures should ultimately be supported by recurring revenues.***

Because the FY27 budget was substantially developed before my arrival, I have not attempted to make significant changes during the final stages of the process. Instead, I have used the budget review as an opportunity to begin learning IECC's financial model, revenue sources, expenditure patterns, enrollment assumptions, and approach to resource allocation. Chief Financial Officer Ryan Hawkins and I will continue that work throughout the coming year.

My longer-term objective is straightforward: *IECC should work toward developing structurally balanced operating budgets while continuing to make appropriate investments in students, employees, programs, facilities, and institutional priorities.* Fund balances provide important financial stability and allow an institution to respond to opportunities, emergencies, and strategic needs; they should not, however, become a recurring substitute for aligning ongoing revenues and expenditures.

The budget also reinforces the importance of connecting financial planning more directly with enrollment, academic and workforce programming, facilities, staffing, and institutional strategy. Understanding the true cost and contribution of programs and services will help us make better-informed decisions about where to invest, where opportunities for growth may exist, and how resources can best support IECC's mission.

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As I become more familiar with IECC's financial and information systems, **I also intend to incorporate a consistent set of institutional performance measures into future Chancellor's Reports.** At a minimum, I anticipate that these will include recurring information regarding enrollment and financial performance, with additional measures developed over time as we determine which indicators provide the Board and the broader IECC community with the most meaningful picture of institutional performance.

Shared Governance and Employee Engagement

An important part of my transition has also been beginning to develop relationships with faculty and employees across IECC. During the reporting period, I met with representatives of the IECC Faculty Association, along with members of the administrative team, for an introductory conversation focused primarily on getting to know one another and beginning what I hope will become a productive working relationship.

Our conversation touched on several topics, including communication, student needs, academic decision-making, shared governance, and the importance of trust. I appreciated the willingness of everyone involved to engage in a candid and constructive conversation. While there are historical issues and differing perspectives that will take time to fully understand, I believe there is value in creating regular opportunities for faculty and administration to communicate outside the formal collective bargaining process.

One distinction will be particularly important as we move forward. **Shared governance and collective bargaining serve different purposes.** Collective bargaining provides the formal process for addressing wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment. Shared governance should provide broader opportunities for faculty, staff, administrators, and other appropriate stakeholders to contribute their expertise and perspectives to institutional issues and decisions. Maintaining clarity between those functions can allow both to operate more effectively.

I have consistently described trust as something that develops when words and actions align over time. It cannot be created through a single meeting or initiative. My hope is that regular communication, meaningful opportunities for participation, clear decision-making processes, and follow-through on commitments will provide a foundation upon which stronger relationships can continue to develop.

These conversations are still very early, and I do not expect every issue to be easy or every perspective to be the same. Healthy institutions should be able to accommodate disagreement while maintaining productive relationships and a common focus on students. I look forward to continuing that work with faculty, staff, and administrative leaders throughout IECC.

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Board Engagement and Communication

My introductory meetings with each of IECC's seven Trustees also provided an opportunity to discuss how we can strengthen communication and preparation for Board meetings. **Beginning with the October meeting cycle, Board materials will generally be distributed earlier, with a goal of providing Trustees approximately five to seven days to review materials before each regular meeting.**

I also plan to begin meeting individually with Trustees prior to regular Board meetings. These meetings will provide an opportunity for Trustees to ask questions, seek clarification, and discuss agenda items before the meeting. They will also allow me to identify questions that may require additional information from members of the administrative team so that Trustees can receive timely and accurate responses.

These changes will also influence the role of the Chancellor's Report. Historically, Chancellor's Reports have provided Trustees with substantial background and context regarding individual Board matters. Going forward, detailed information supporting Board action will increasingly be incorporated into the Board materials themselves. Where appropriate, significant action items will be accompanied by a concise Board memorandum outlining the background, relevant considerations, financial implications, and recommended action.

This approach is intended to give Trustees adequate time and information to prepare for meetings while allowing the Chancellor's Report to serve a somewhat different purpose. Rather than functioning primarily as an extension of the Board agenda, the report will increasingly focus on institutional performance, strategic progress, significant developments, emerging issues, and other matters that help the Board and the broader IECC community understand the work and direction of the institution.

As these practices develop, I will continue seeking feedback from Trustees and the administrative team and adjust where they improve the quality, timeliness, and usefulness of Board communication.

2027 Board of Trustees Election. The next consolidated election for members of the IECC Board of Trustees will be held April 6, 2027. Three six-year Trustee terms, currently held by Roger Browning, Esther Cha, and Jan Ridgely, will be subject to election. The candidate filing period is November 16–23, 2026. The Office of the Board Secretary will administer the District's responsibilities associated with candidate filing and certification in accordance with applicable election requirements. Additional information will be made available to prospective candidates as the filing period approaches.

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Community and External Engagement

IECC's mission extends well beyond the boundaries of our campuses, and another important part of my first month has been reconnecting with the communities and organizations our colleges serve. As I continue learning IECC, I want to better understand not only what occurs within our colleges, but also how employers, community organizations, educational partners, and other stakeholders view IECC and the role they need us to play in the region.

During the reporting period, I attended a local Rotary meeting at the invitation of Trustee McLaughlin and had the opportunity to provide the program. The visit provided an opportunity to introduce myself, share some initial thoughts about community colleges and IECC, and begin developing relationships with community members. Engagement of this kind is particularly valuable because our colleges are community institutions, and maintaining strong connections with the communities we serve is essential to understanding their changing needs.

My campus visits have also provided opportunities to meet with Foundation representatives and learn more about the important role our four college foundations play in supporting students and their respective colleges. These initial conversations have reinforced that each Foundation has its own history, culture, relationships, and capacity. I look forward to continuing to learn from Foundation leaders and exploring how their work can support the long-term priorities of their colleges and IECC. My OCC visit, for example, highlighted support for scholarships, professional development, theater, athletics, and other college activities.

I also visited IECC's Mining and Industrial Training operations located at Southeastern Illinois College and in West Frankfort at the John A. Logan College facility. These operations provide another perspective on IECC's regional role and the importance of maintaining strong relationships with employers and industry. Workforce education is most effective when it remains responsive to the industries we serve, and I look forward to learning more about how IECC can continue supporting the workforce and economic needs of southern Illinois.

Statewide engagement will also remain an important component of my work as Chancellor. IECC benefits from strong relationships with organizations and partners throughout Illinois, and I expect future reports to include significant developments involving state agencies, community-college organizations, legislative activity, and collaborative initiatives when those developments are relevant to IECC.

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Looking Ahead

My first month as Chancellor produced considerably more questions than answers, and at this stage I believe that is appropriate. I have tried to approach these first several weeks with curiosity – listening to people with different experiences and perspectives, observing how the organization operates, and resisting the temptation to move too quickly from identifying an issue to prescribing a solution.

Several areas will continue to receive attention during the coming months. I want to develop a deeper understanding of IECC's enrollment and financial performance; the academic and workforce identity of each of our colleges; the relationship between institutional priorities and facility needs; organizational roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority; and the ways we communicate and engage employees in the work of the institution. These issues are interconnected, and I believe we will make better decisions by understanding those relationships rather than addressing individual concerns in isolation.

I also want to continue spending time where the work of IECC occurs. My initial campus visits provided an important introduction, but a single visit cannot provide a complete understanding of a college or community. I intend to return regularly to each of our colleges, continue meeting with students and employees, and create opportunities for conversations that move beyond introduction into more focused discussions about the future.

As this work continues, data will become increasingly important in testing what I am hearing and observing. Experience and perspective matter, but they should be considered alongside evidence. Enrollment patterns, student outcomes, financial information, program performance, workforce demand, facility needs, and other institutional measures can help us determine whether our assumptions are accurate and where attention and resources may be most needed.

Most importantly, I remain encouraged by what I have seen during these first several weeks. IECC has challenges to work through and questions worth asking, but it also has significant strengths – strong colleges, committed employees, engaged students, supportive communities, and a long history of serving this region.

I am grateful to the many people who have welcomed me, shared their perspectives, answered my questions, and helped me begin learning IECC. I look forward to continuing that work as partners.