FORWARD >>>
>> >>>TOGETHER

INNOVATE
Driving Growth & Excellence Together

Guided Pathways

Dr. Ryan Gower; Chancellor

What You'll Leave With:

1) The Story
   Origins & driving forces

2) The Strategy
   The pillars and intended impact

3) The Stakes
   Why adopting it is critical for IECC & our students

Four Pillars of Guided Pathways

CLARIFY THE PATH

HELP STUDENTS CHOOSE AND ENTER A PATH

HELP STUDENTS STAY ON THE PATH

ENSURE THAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING

OUR MISSION
To deliver exceptional education and services to improve the lives of our students and to strengthen our local communities.

OUR VISION
Illinois Eastern Community Colleges is an institution that engages, challenges and supports faculty and students as they pursue excellence in teaching and learning. We place the needs of our students at the center of our decision making, and will continue to be an organization committed to excellence, innovation and continuous improvement.

They don't say *"Do things the way we've always done them."*
    They also don't say *"Change just for the sake of change"*

They don't say *"Prioritize our comfort over student success or sustainability."*
    They also don't say *"Change has to be miserable."*

If we truly believe our mission and vision, standing still is not an option – our courage to change is the proof we mean what we say.

Guided Pathways – The Origin Story

Emergence (2010s):
- Research by the *Community College Research Center (CCRC)* at Columbia University showed that most students were leaving community colleges without a credential.
- National student success data revealed that a "cafeteria" model — offering hundreds of unstructured choices — often left students confused, taking excess credits, or dropping out.

Catalyst Reports & Early Adopters:
- *CCRC's "Redesigning America's Community Colleges"* (Bailey, Jaggars, Jenkins, 2015) became the blueprint.
- Early large-scale pilots (e.g., in Tennessee, Florida, Washington) aimed to prove that structured programs, proactive advising, and career-aligned pathways could increase completion and equity.

Core Purposes:
- **Clarity:** Help students choose and enter a pathway early.
- **Structure:** 1) Map out clear, efficient course sequences toward a credential.
- **Structure:** 2) Provide targeted advising and wraparound services so students stay on track.
- **Equity:** Close achievement gaps by ensuring all students—especially first-gen and underserved (diversity, rural, low SES) —receive consistent, high-touch, high-quality guidance.
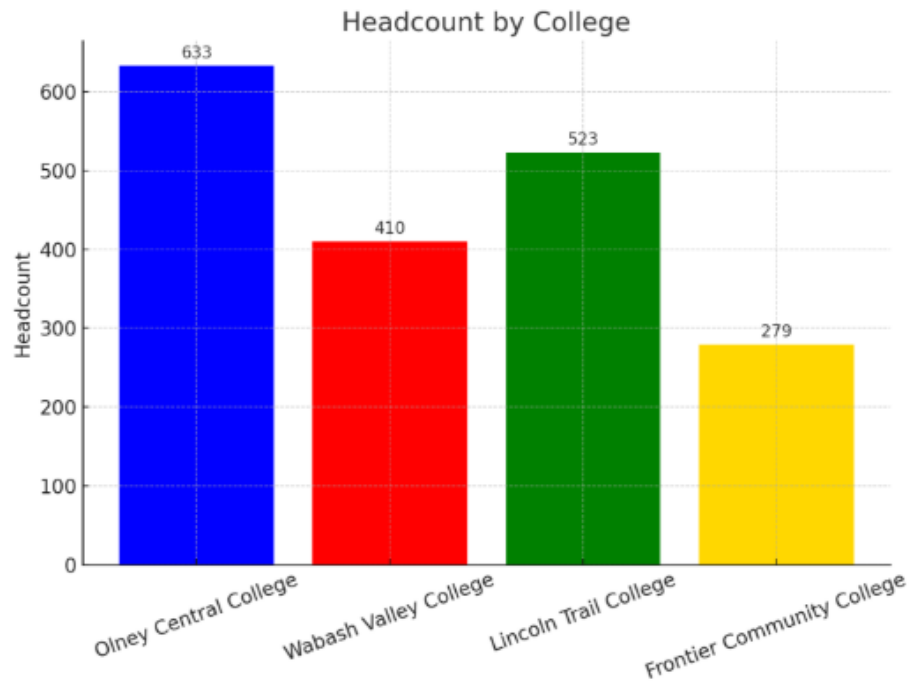
Guided Pathways – The Origin Story

INTENTIONALITY

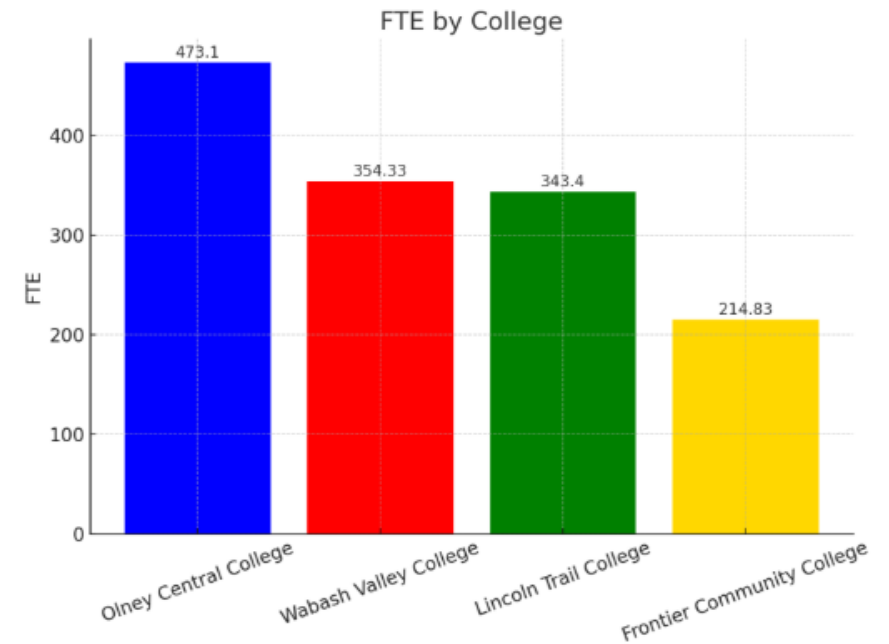designing every step of the student experience on purpose, with clear goals and no wasted motion

Guided Pathways – The IECC Story
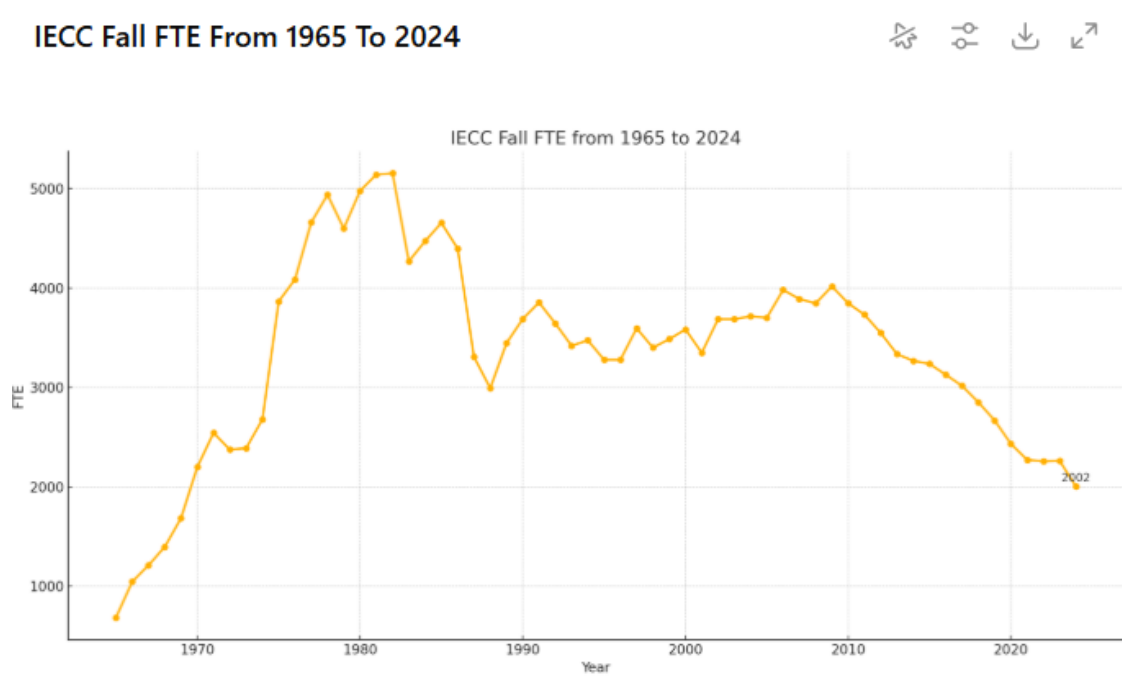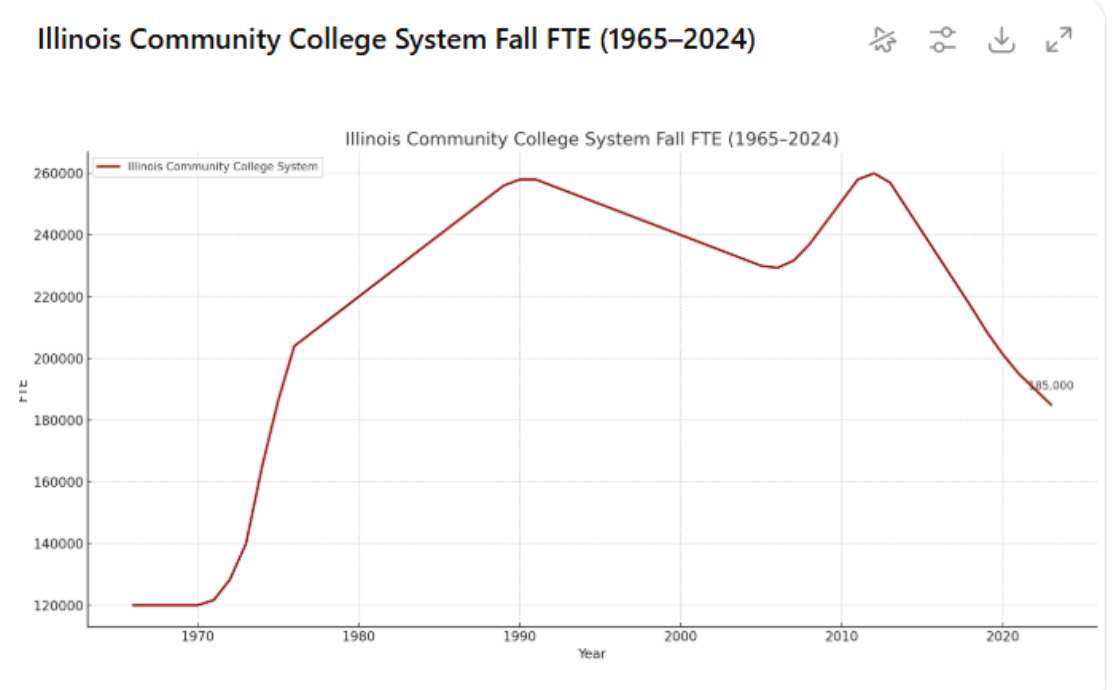

Headcount By College

Headcount by College

College	Headcount
Olney Central College	633
Wabash Valley College	410
Lincoln Trail College	523
Frontier Community College	279

FTE By College

FTE by College

College	FTE
Olney Central College	473.1
Wabash Valley College	354.33
Lincoln Trail College	343.4
Frontier Community College	214.83

Guided Pathways – The IECC Story

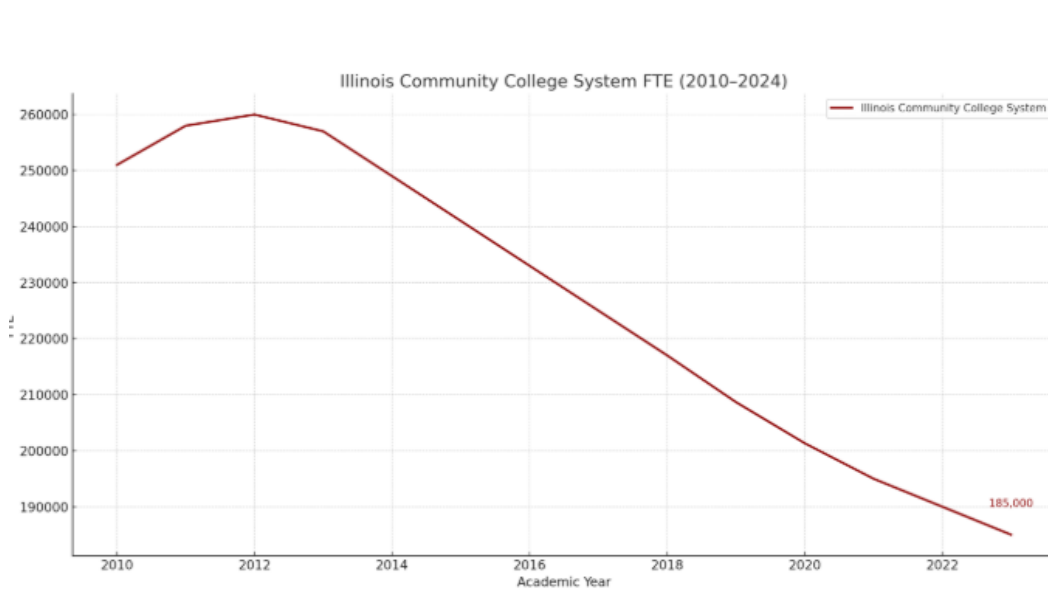1965-1980 -Baby Boomers flood into higher education

1980-1990 – Access & Affordability

1990-2010 – The expansion of CTE (short-term training, adults, displaced workers) in "great recession" era
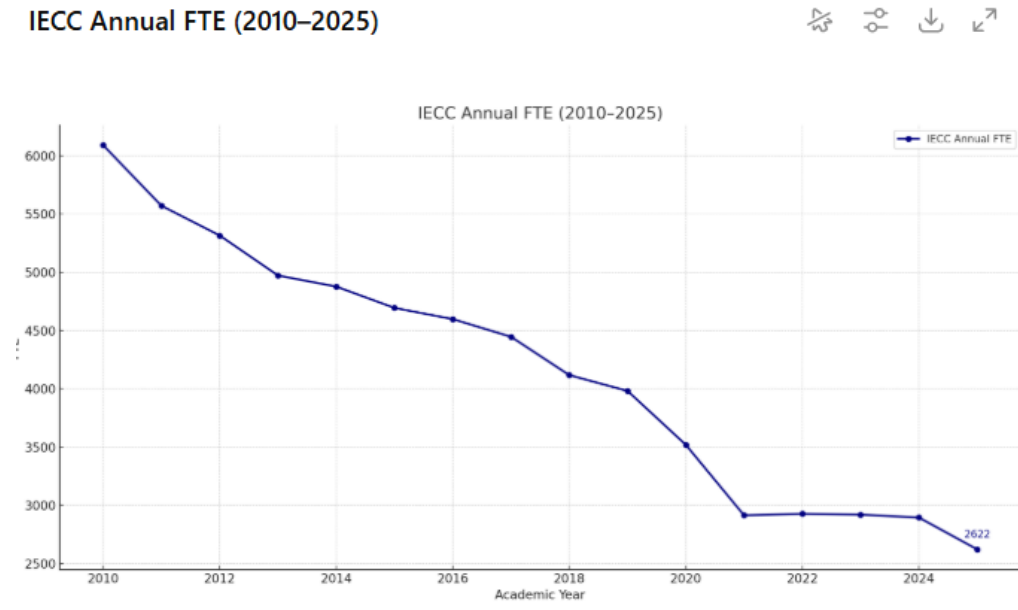
Guided Pathways – The IECC Story

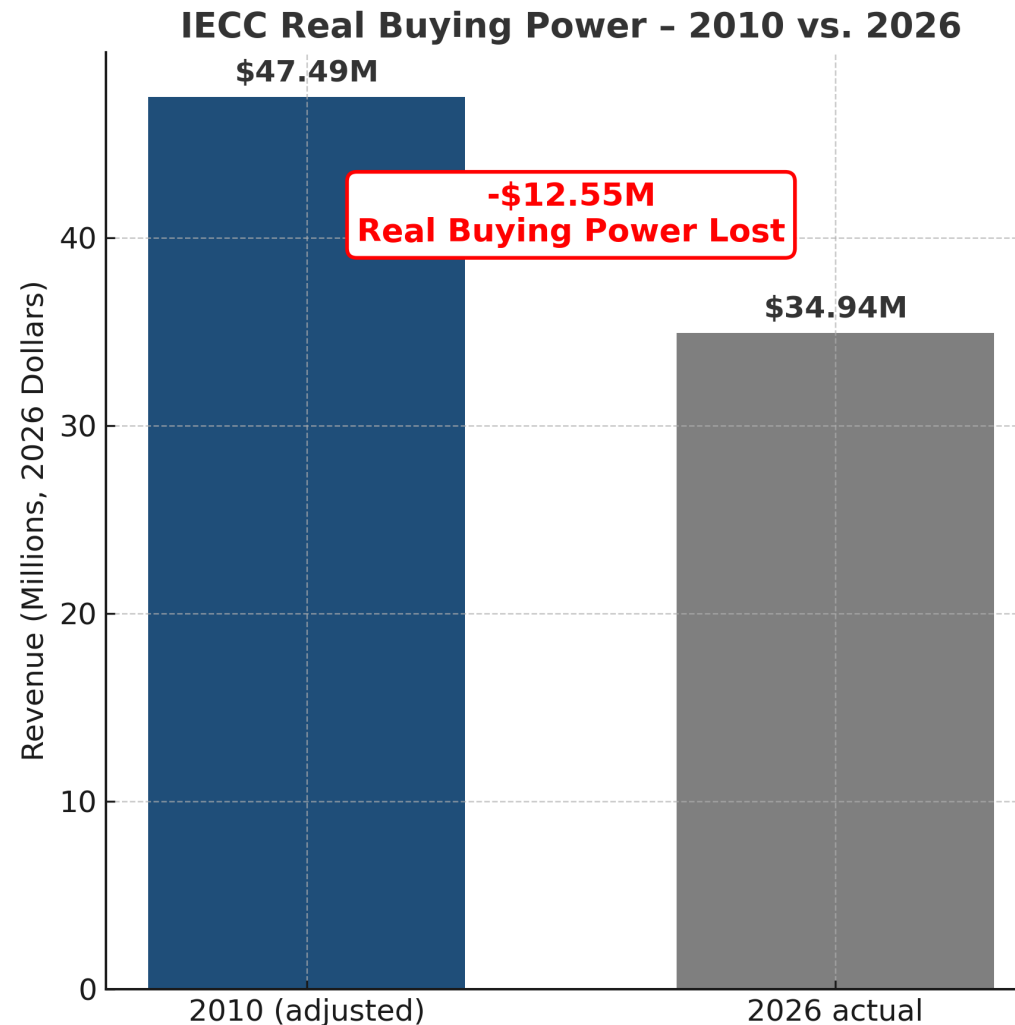Illinois Community College System FTE (2010–2024)

IECC Annual FTE (2010–2025)

- **Illinois Community College System – down ~40% since 2010**
- **IECC system – down ~57% since 2010**
  - Fewer HS graduates
  - Low unemployment reduces demand for training/retraining
  - Competition – 4-year, online/for-profit
  - Pandemic Impact
  - **IECC (system) has a "freshman class" comparable to most smaller, single-campus suburban colleges**.

Guided Pathways – The IECC Story

IECC Real Buying Power – 2010 vs. 2026

$47.49M

-$12.55M
Real Buying Power Lost

$34.94M

Revenue (Millions, 2026 Dollars)

40

30

20

10

0

2010 (adjusted)   2026 actual

INTENTIONALITY

No spare dollars.
No spare time.
Our resources must be aimed where it matters most for students.

FORWARD >>>
>> >>>TOGETHER

The Story

The Strategy

The Stakes

The Strategy

Pillar 1: Clarify the Paths

1) Conduct feasibility studies to determine transfer pathways would be "in-demand & sustainable" for IECC to offer
2) Organize all pathways into clear categories to guide undecided students without loss of credits.
3) Develop program learning outcomes for every credential before creating curriculum maps.
4) Create semester by semester curriculum maps for every credential we offer.
5) Streamline catalog & website navigation to make pathways, maps and outcomes easy to find.
6) Establish regular review cycles for faculty, staff, employers and transfer partners to keep our pathways relevant & current.

The Strategy

Pillar 2: Help Students Choose & Enter a Path

1) Create student friendly descriptions of meta-majors/pathways to support undecided students during intake. (MarCom '26 goal)
2) Align onboarding processes across campuses including application, placement, orientation, career exploration, and first-year experiences.
3) Implement a centralized advising model with common expectations and tools across the district. (SALT '26 goal)
4) Provide career and transfer outcome information for every pathway including salaries, articulation agreements, program maps, and staff resources (MarCom '26 goal)
5) Redesign Developmental & Bridge Pathways to reduce time to college-level coursework or faster entry to desired program of study.

The Strategy

Pillar 3: Help Students Stay on the Path

1) Implement proactive support based on risk factors identified at time of admission.
2) Use Degree Works to track student progress toward completion.
3) Improve our early alert system for academic and engagement concerns.
4) Intentional, targeted, high touch connection to support resources (office hours, learning commons, CETL) to targeted student populations.
5) Develop required check-ins for EVERY student (enrolled or unenrolled) at key milestones (credits or semester; 100% time to completion, 150% time to completion, etc.)

The Strategy

Pillar 4: Ensure Students Are Learning

- Align assessment practices with course, program, and institutional learning outcomes (direct) to measure achievement consistently.

- Expand applied learning opportunities such as internships, clinicals, and work-based projects and triangulate data (indirect) to assess student learning.

- Use faculty, employer and transfer partner feedback to inform curriculum updates.

- Provide faculty development through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to strengthen evidence-based teaching.

- Use student learning data to guide continuous improvement in programs and courses.

The Strategy

Phase 1 - Reorganization & Building the Case (2023–2026)

Where We've Been

- Consolidated four independent colleges into a unified IECC system.
- Created new district-wide divisions (Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Business & Industry, Institutional Outreach).
- Conducted feasibility studies to determine sustainable transfer and career pathways.
- Developed meta-majors, program learning outcomes, and program maps for all credentials.
- Piloted early Guided Pathways tools and practices (Career Coach, Degree Works, Recruit, CRM Advise).
- Built AND STILL BUILDING an internal understanding of the "why" behind Guided Pathways.

The Strategy

Phase 2 – Implementation & Scaling (2026-2029)

Where We're Going Next

- Fully deploy all four pillars across the district.
- Integrate advising, early alert, learning commons, career services, and academic progress tracking into a seamless, HIGH-TOUCH student support system.
- Launch our transfer & CTE pathways, & build loyalty pipelines from Dual Credit to these pathways.
- Identify pathways/programs/populations that need development or bridge support.
- Launch streamlined catalog and website for clear program navigation.
- Expand applied learning opportunities and employer/transfer partner engagement.
- Make Guided Pathways part of every student's IECC experience from first contact to completion and beyond…

The Strategy

Phase 3 – Continuous Improvement & Innovation (2029 forward)

The Long Game

- Use data to identify and close equity gaps.
- Adjust program maps, supports, and curriculum based on student outcomes.
- Deepen partnerships with employers, transfer institutions, and communities.
- Embed Guided Pathways principles into the culture so they sustain beyond leadership transitions

The Stakes

Our mission demands action. Standing still is not an option – our courage to change is the proof we value what we say we value.

Our resources are limited. Guided Pathways is how we ensure continued operation from our four campuses and that our dollars and our efforts advance student success.

We are getting smaller – and we will get smaller still. The only question was if we would shape that future intentionally, or allow it to be shaped for us. We chose intentionality.

Our students are worth it. We need to be thoughtful & deliberate, but every semester we delay is a group of students who aren't getting the best IECC can offer them.

The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second-best time is now.