



Issue 34 / March 2026

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

ILLINOIS EASTERN
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Across the District

- » From the Office of the Chancellor
- » Facilities & Technology Survey
- » Enrollment Management Update
- » CONNECT: Call for Presenters
- » VC Town Hall Dates
- » Support After Champ Closure
- » “Running Start” Tuition Waivers
- » TRIO UB Updates
- » Financial Aid Office Goes Digital
- » TRIO Policy Seminar in D.C.

News at the Colleges

- » FCC *The Voyager*
- » LTC *Network LT*
- » OCC *Knightline*
- » WVC *View from the Valley*
- » TimelyCare

Division Meeting Minutes

[Academic Affairs](#)

[Business Operations](#)

[Institutional Outreach](#)

[Student Affairs](#)

[Board of Trustees Mar. News Releases](#)

[SEPC Meeting Minutes](#)

[Division Town Hall Meeting Dates](#)

[IECC Strategic Engagement Plan](#)

FORWARD >>>
>>> **TOGETHER**

ACROSS THE DISTRICT

From the Office of the Chancellor

Advocacy for Access to Higher Education

I want to take a few minutes to talk with you about something important that is developing at the federal level involving TRIO, specifically the Talent Search program.

When I first joined IECC a decade ago, I did not know much about TRIO. As I have come to learn more about the program, its purpose, goals and activities, the people who run it, and the students they serve, the more strongly I have come to support it.

As an educator, and even as someone who tends to be fiscally conservative, I believe programs like TRIO are exactly the kind of investment that should be made with public dollars. This program is all about giving students the structure, guidance, and opportunity they need to become self-sufficient through education. Republican, Democrat or Independent, this is the type of work that should have bi-partisan support.

At IECC we know and serve these students. They are our students, friends of our children, neighbors, or community members. They are first-generation students with limited financial means. They often have difficulty navigating systems that assume everyone has the same type of background or family support. TRIO works because it meets them where they are and helps them move forward through access to higher education.

What is being proposed in Washington right now would change that.

The Department of Education is proposing changes to Talent Search that would shift its focus away from its core mission of college access and success and toward a broader emphasis on workforce and job training. At IECC, we know and believe that workforce development matters, and we are proud to do that work every day. But that is not what TRIO was intended or built to do, and workforce development should not come at the expense of helping all students get to and through college. What is being proposed would shrink the size of the program and potentially result in more than 200,000 students losing service.

There are also changes being proposed to how grants are awarded that could concentrate funding in fewer places and create real geographic gaps in service. For institutions like IECC, this could make it more difficult to successfully compete (IECC has not had the Talent Search grant since 2016) for a Talent Search grant in the future. It could also reduce access for students in our region if funding shifts away from rural communities or toward larger, centralized programs, which many critics argue is likely to happen.

In rural areas like ours, the impact would be serious. If TRIO services are reduced or no longer available in our region, there is nothing waiting behind it to fill that gap, and rural districts like ours do not have the financial resources to replicate that level of student support on our own.

This is one of those moments where decisions made in Washington have very real consequences for students and families in District 529 and those in other rural districts in our region.

So here is my ask of you all. If you also believe in the work TRIO is doing, I would encourage you to take action.

(Cont. next page)

(Chancellor cont.)

You can contact your U.S. House Representative and both U.S. Senators and ask them to share your perspective with the Secretary of Education on this issue. The message should be simple:

The current Talent Search proposal should be rescinded, revised, and reissued in a way that preserves its focus on college access. There should be no lapse in services for students, even if that means extending current grants.

If you are not sure who to contact, you can find your representatives here:

<https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>

You can call their office or just send an email. You do not need to be an expert. Just speak from your experience. If you have seen TRIO change a student's life, say that and let them know that the program should not be diminished or changed.

I do not see this as a partisan issue, and we should not allow it to become one. This is about students, and standing up for programs that serve them and benefit our community.

As an institution, we will continue to follow this closely and encourage advocacy where appropriate. But voices from people doing the work and seeing the impact every day are important.

Ryan Gower, Ph.D.

Chancellor; Illinois Eastern Community Colleges

IECC Facilities and Technology Survey

Whether you primarily use Frontier, Lincoln Trail, Olney Central, Wabash Valley, or any of our additional locations, you're part of the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC). Your experiences matter to us!

IECC is asking students and employees who have used an IECC location in person this spring to complete a short Facilities & Technology Survey. The survey takes about 4 minutes and will help IECC improve building conditions, accessibility, Wi-Fi, bandwidth, classroom technology, and other day-to-day campus infrastructure.

Please answer for the one IECC location/building you use most often. Responses are anonymous and will be reported in summary form.

To access the survey please click here. If the survey does not open automatically, please copy and paste the following link to your internet browser's address bar:

<https://baseline.campuslabs.com/p/?uuid=b1399543316f4715a16afb1a0a8bb98b>

Survey open: Monday, March 23 through Friday, April 3

All responses are confidential and will be reported in summary form only.

Thank you for helping us create better learning and working environments for everyone in the IECC community.

Enrollment Management Update

IECC recently hosted Student Parent Information Nights (SPIN) at Frontier Community College, Lincoln Trail College, Wabash Valley College, and Olney Central College.

While attendance was smaller than anticipated, the events proved to be highly impactful. The smaller groups allowed for more personal, one-on-one conversations, giving students and families valuable time to connect with faculty and staff, ask questions, and explore their options with confidence.

At Lincoln Trail College, SPIN also featured an Ag Expo, where local agriculture businesses and industry partners attended to promote the college's new agriculture classes. This added opportunity gave students a direct look at career pathways in the ag industry and strengthened the connection between education and workforce needs.

Carrie and Curtis would like to extend a sincere thank you to everyone who attended, and a special thank you to our faculty and staff whose time, energy, and commitment made these events meaningful and successful.

Other events in March as well:

- ACES Challenge at OCC
- Rapid Response Meetings for Champion Lab workers at FCC
- Celebrate Art Day at LTC
- Twin Rivers Day at LTC
- Young Women Lead Day at LTC
- Effingham Career Fair
- Wayne County Scholastic Bowl at FCC
- CTE Day at OCC
- Mattoon Futures Day
- Hight School Visits

Coming up in April:

- Career Fair at Lincoln High School
- Kindergarten Day at FCC
- Dieterich HS Career Fair
- Flora 9th graders visit FCC & OCC
- Hutsonville Career Fair
- Health Fest for 7th graders at FCC
- EDS Lineman Rodeo at FCC
- Homeschool Night at the NUC
- Marshall Career Fair
- Martinsville HS Juniors & Seniors Visit LTC

IECC Employees Serve on IAI Panel Review

The Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) panel review is a faculty-driven process where discipline-specific experts evaluate college courses for statewide transfer approval (GECC or Majors). Panels review submitted syllabi against set criteria for approval, conditional approval (minor changes needed), or rejection. There are six general education (GECC) panels and fifteen active major panels. Panels evaluate courses based on the IAI descriptor, learning objectives, and content guidelines to ensure they meet the essential concepts of the discipline.

The following IECC employees are participating in the IAI panel review this year as panel members:

Angel Kerner

Jamie Carman: Communications panel

Jason Hortin: Psychology panel

Austin Alexander: SBS GECC panel

Drew McMurray: Political Science panel

Cyndi Boyce: Political Science panel



CONNECT 2026 (Fall IECC District Workshop): Call for Presenters

The IECC All District Workshop will be held on **Wednesday, August 12, 2026**, at Olney Central College, bringing employees from across the district together for a day centered on connection, collaboration, and shared learning.

This year's theme, **CONNECT**, reflects our commitment to building meaningful relationships across campuses, departments, and roles. One of the most impactful ways we do this is by learning directly from one another.

We are currently seeking breakout session proposals from faculty, staff, and administrators who are interested in sharing their knowledge, experiences, and ideas. Your insight could benefit colleagues across IECC.

Sessions will be 45 minutes in length and should include an intentional networking component to help participants actively engage and connect during the session.

We encourage both individual and group presentations. A list of suggested topics is available to help spark ideas.

Proposal Deadline: April 30, 2026

Submit your proposal: [2026 IECC Workshop Call for Proposals - CONNECT](#)

If you have questions or would like help developing your idea, please contact Sonja Holtz (ext. 5522 or holtzs4@iecc.edu).

Let's make CONNECT 2026 a day where we truly learn from each other and strengthen the connections that make IECC exceptional.



Vice Chancellor Town Halls

Vice Chancellor Town Hall Meetings:

- **April 13 - OCC Student Services Conference Room: 11:00 - 12:00 pm and 1:00 - 2:00 pm**
- **April 14 - WVC Learning Commons: 11:00 - 12:00 pm and 1:00 - 2:00 pm**
- **April 28 - FCC Mason Hall Conference Room: 11:00 - 12:00 pm and 1:00 - 2:00 pm**

IECC Supports Community Following Champion Labs Closure

Following the sudden closure of Champion Labs in Albion, which impacted hundreds of individuals across the region, **IECC quickly mobilized to support displaced workers through a series of Work Readiness Lab events held March 9–13 across district campuses and the Albion community.**

These labs were designed to provide immediate, hands-on assistance in a supportive, one-on-one setting. Participants received help with resume and cover letter development, job applications, interview preparation, career exploration, and access to computers, printing, and community resources. Resource packets were also provided to help individuals continue their job search independently.

The events were made possible by IECC faculty and staff who volunteered to assist community members during a time of urgent need. The strong turnout and positive response underscored the importance of accessible, personalized support during this time of transition for members of our communities.

Due to the popularity of these events, additional Work Readiness Lab sessions were scheduled on March 26 and March 31. IECC remains committed to supporting individuals and families impacted by this closure by connecting them with resources, training opportunities, and pathways to new employment.

Local Students Earn “Running Start” Tuition Waivers

High school seniors across southeastern Illinois who have already taken college classes or explored entrepreneurship while still in school will soon have another opportunity waiting for them after graduation.

Through Illinois Eastern Community Colleges’ new Running Start program, eligible students who participated in dual credit courses or the CEO entrepreneurship program will receive a three-credit tuition waiver they can use for a class at IECC after graduating from high school. More than 750 graduating seniors across the District will be eligible for the award this year. For some students, it could mean stepping back onto campus just weeks after graduation — this time as a college student continuing the path they began while still in high school.

Vice Chancellor of Institutional Outreach and Lincoln Trail College President Tona Ambrose said the program was created to recognize the initiative students have already shown by beginning college-level coursework early. “Students who complete dual credit courses or participate in CEO are already demonstrating college and career readiness,” Ambrose said. “Running Start recognizes that effort and encourages them to keep their educational journey going.” Students may use the tuition waiver for any three-credit class within one year of graduating from high school, giving them an opportunity to continue their education locally while exploring academic and career interests. Ambrose said the program builds on the success of IECC’s partnerships with high schools throughout the district.

“The Running Start program extends the impact of our dual credit and CEO partnerships by creating a clear next step for students,” she said. “It strengthens the pipeline from high school directly into college.” Ambrose said the goal of the program is to help students maintain the momentum they have already built through their early college and career experiences. “Running Start sends a strong message that IECC recognizes students who take initiative in their education,” she said. “Most importantly, it shows them that the work they’ve already done can lead directly to new opportunities.”



TRIO

UPWARD BOUND

IECC MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026

- **RECRUITMENT & ENGAGEMENT**

UPWARD BOUND HAS REACHED OUR RECRUITMENT GOALS AT LTC AND WVC, WITH OCC ONLY NEEDING TO FILL 1 SPOT!

- **OPEN HOUSE FOR STEM LAB AT OCC**

THE STEM LAB OPEN HOUSE WAS HELD ON FEBRUARY 27, 2026. THE LAB IS MORE THAN A PHYSICAL SPACE—IT REPRESENTS A CULTURE OF INNOVATION, CREATIVITY, AND PROBLEM-SOLVING FOR OUR STUDENTS. HERE, STUDENTS CAN PARTICIPATE IN HANDS-ON, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING THAT BUILDS CURIOSITY AND CONFIDENCE THROUGH TOOLS AND EXPERIENCES LIKE CODING, ROBOTICS, ESPORTS, AND MORE. MANY OF OUR STUDENTS COME FROM RURAL, LOW-INCOME, AND FIRST-GENERATION BACKGROUNDS WHERE ACCESS TO STEM RESOURCES CAN BE LIMITED, SO THIS SPACE HELPS BRIDGE THAT GAP AND SUPPORTS COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

- **POLICY SEMINAR 2026 ATTENDED BY CHRISTY MORLEY**

HELD MARCH 8–11, 2026, IN WASHINGTON, D.C. THEME: “ONE MISSION. ONE VOICE. ONE TRIO.” EMPHASIZING UNITY AND ADVOCACY FOR STUDENT OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS.

- OVER 700 TRIO PROFESSIONALS ATTENDED THE POLICY SEMINAR.
- HOSTED AT THE CAPITAL HILTON NEAR THE WHITE HOUSE AND CAPITOL HILL.
- THE SUMMIT REINFORCED TRIO’S IMPORTANCE AMID FEDERAL CHALLENGES AND HIGHLIGHTED THE COMMUNITY’S UNIFIED ADVOCACY.
- AIMED TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ELEVATE LEADERS WITHIN THE TRIO COMMUNITY, AND ADVOCATE FOR CONTINUED BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR THE TRIO PROGRAM.

TRIO U.B. STUDENT SPOTLIGHT IVY FEURY



IVY IS A SENIOR AT MOUNT CARMEL HIGH SCHOOL, WHERE SHE IS AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THE COLOR GUARD, THE SCHOOL MUSICAL, AND THE NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY. AFTER GRADUATION, SHE WILL ATTEND MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY ON A \$40,000 SCHOLARSHIP TO PURSUE A NURSING DEGREE.

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 11TH

TRIO SPRING TRIP
MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY

APRIL 18TH

LAST WORKSHOP

<https://iecc.edu/trioub>

Financial Aid Office Goes Digital

Did you know that each academic term, the Financial Aid Offices at IECC send nearly 2,000 letters? These include award letters, tracking and outstanding document notices, SAP notifications, rejected ISIR letters, student loan exit counseling letters, default notices, and much more. 📧

Beginning with the 2026–2027 aid year, IECC will move to 90% digital communication.

That's right—IECC email will become the primary place for students to receive financial aid information. 📧

Students will still receive their initial Welcome to IECC letter and financial aid award letter by mail. After that, all additional financial aid correspondence will be sent to the student's IECC email account.

What if a student doesn't have an active IECC email account?

In those cases, our team will reach out to the student's personal email listed in their CRM application, asking them to contact the Financial Aid Office as soon as possible.

Moving to digital communication will help reduce printing and postage costs across the district and allow our office to better track whether students actually receive their information. 🇺🇸 That means no more “I never received the letter in the mail.”

Over the past year, Financial Aid and IT have worked closely together to convert all letters and correspondence into email formats through FormFusion and Banner, making this transition possible. 🚀



TRIO 2026 Policy Seminar in Washington, D.C.

TRIO SSS has been busy the past few months. 65,000 students were removed from TRIO programs that had been serving them when reduced funding decisions were made by members of the current administration. Not only did those students lose their support systems, but those TRIO programs also had to stop serving directors, advisors, counselors, and others who worked in those programs. Many no longer had positions unless their institutions chose to fund them.

But they did not stop fighting—and neither did we.

TRIO programs across the United States united and sent a clear message: our students deserve access to higher education through the funding the U.S. Department of Education had set aside for them. We, along with advocates across the country, sent letters, made calls, arranged visits, and kept TRIO in the conversation.

This year, we were honored that one student from each of our four campuses was able to accompany us to the TRIO Policy Seminar 2026. We had our work cut out for us with an application and essay process to determine participants. Our five-person TRIO team at IECC carefully reviewed strong submissions from multiple campuses.

After thoughtful consideration, we selected:

- Jason Nguyen (FCC)
- Al Crosley (LTC)
- Liam Ryden (OCC)
- Caleb Stevenson (WVC)

These students joined us to advocate for TRIO and represent IECC in Washington, D.C.



As this was the first year we brought students, and we were traveling by van, the experience felt a bit like a family trip. With two “trip moms” along, things ran smoothly—despite storms the entire drive there. According to the guys, it was well worth it:

Al shared, “I thought D.C. was wonderful.”

Liam said, “I could not be more grateful for my trip to Washington, D.C. with TRIO. I gained so much valuable experience and was able to see some of the most beautiful architecture and historical parts of our country.”

Jason reflected, “The city itself was a wonderful experience. I saw so many social classes, and the cityscape was so different from anything I had seen before. That doesn’t even include the monuments and memorials. It was a fantastic cultural experience to step outside the comfort of small city life.”

Caleb added, “My time in D.C. was nothing short of fun. Touring the National Mall was life-changing. I saw monuments I never imagined I would see. The Georgetown University tour was incredible—the buildings were historically beautiful, and the campus was huge. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.” ...

[Click here to read the full article](#)



NEWS AT THE COLLEGES

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The Voyager

Network LT

Knightline

View from the Valley

SKIPPED LUNCH AGAIN BECAUSE MONEY'S TIGHT?

TimelyCare will help you find food resources near campus.

timelycare

100% FREE * NO INSURANCE NEEDED * 24/7 SUPPORT

REGISTER NOW

To submit information for upcoming IECC newsletters, please email newsletter@iecc.edu.