



Issue 30 / October 2025

# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

ILLINOIS EASTERN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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

# ACROSS THE DISTRICT

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## From the Office of the Chancellor

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Dear colleagues,

A few weeks ago, there was an incident at Wabash Valley College that reminded us how quickly a normal day can become uncertain. Two students saw something that didn't look right, immediately reported it, and our faculty acted fast to report and protect their classrooms. Fortunately, the situation turned out to be a misunderstanding—no one was ever in danger—but it gave us a real-world test of how our systems respond when events unfold in real time.

Unlike a drill, this wasn't planned and therefore predictable. It showed us what worked, what didn't, and how quickly small communication gaps can multiply. Faculty and students did exactly what we ask of them: see something, say something, and act to keep others safe. And as a reminder to everyone across our colleges—if you ever perceive imminent danger to our campus community, do not wait or look for permission: call 911 immediately. Once that call is made, notify campus leadership, but your first responsibility is to secure, report, and protect.

This incident also reminded us that even when our people do the right things, our administrative systems must respond just as quickly and clearly. It revealed several weaknesses in coordination and communication that we are now determined to fix.

In case you are wondering if we are aware and doing something, I can assure you the answer is yes. I've held meetings with faculty, staff, and administrators to learn more about the event. We pulled leadership together to discuss what went wrong and how our systemwide approach can be strengthened based on what we know. From these steps, we have already begun taking action. Across our campuses, you'll see renewed emphasis on several key areas:

- Clearer lines of authority when presidents are off campus, so there is always a designated incident commander.
- New & improved emergency signage and refreshed ReGroup alert protocols to ensure messages reach everyone simultaneously.
- Expanded training for faculty, staff, and administrators—both districtwide and on each campus—to build confidence under pressure.
- Regular emergency management meetings on each campus and better incorporation of these topics into our fall & spring workshops each semester. All this will help keep safety planning active and visible, and our emergency.

**The goal here is simple. Every employee should know who is in charge, how to respond, and how to communicate in any situation that arises.** We also have an internal team working on our existing procedures to find better ways to make them even more accessible and useable in the event of a real or perceived emergency. You can find our emergency procedures for each campus by [clicking here](#).

This experience was uncomfortable, but it was also invaluable. We are using it to make our campuses safer and our teams stronger.

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(Chancellor cont.)

Preparedness only works when it's practiced, reflected on, and improved. We are doing that. I encourage you to continue to read our [SEPC and Divisional minutes](#) if you would like to hear more detailed information about the steps we are taking. We also have our next [Vice Chancellor Townhall meeting](#) on 11/4 at Wabash Valley that will allow for more in-depth discussion about this or any other topic you might like to discuss.

Forward Together,



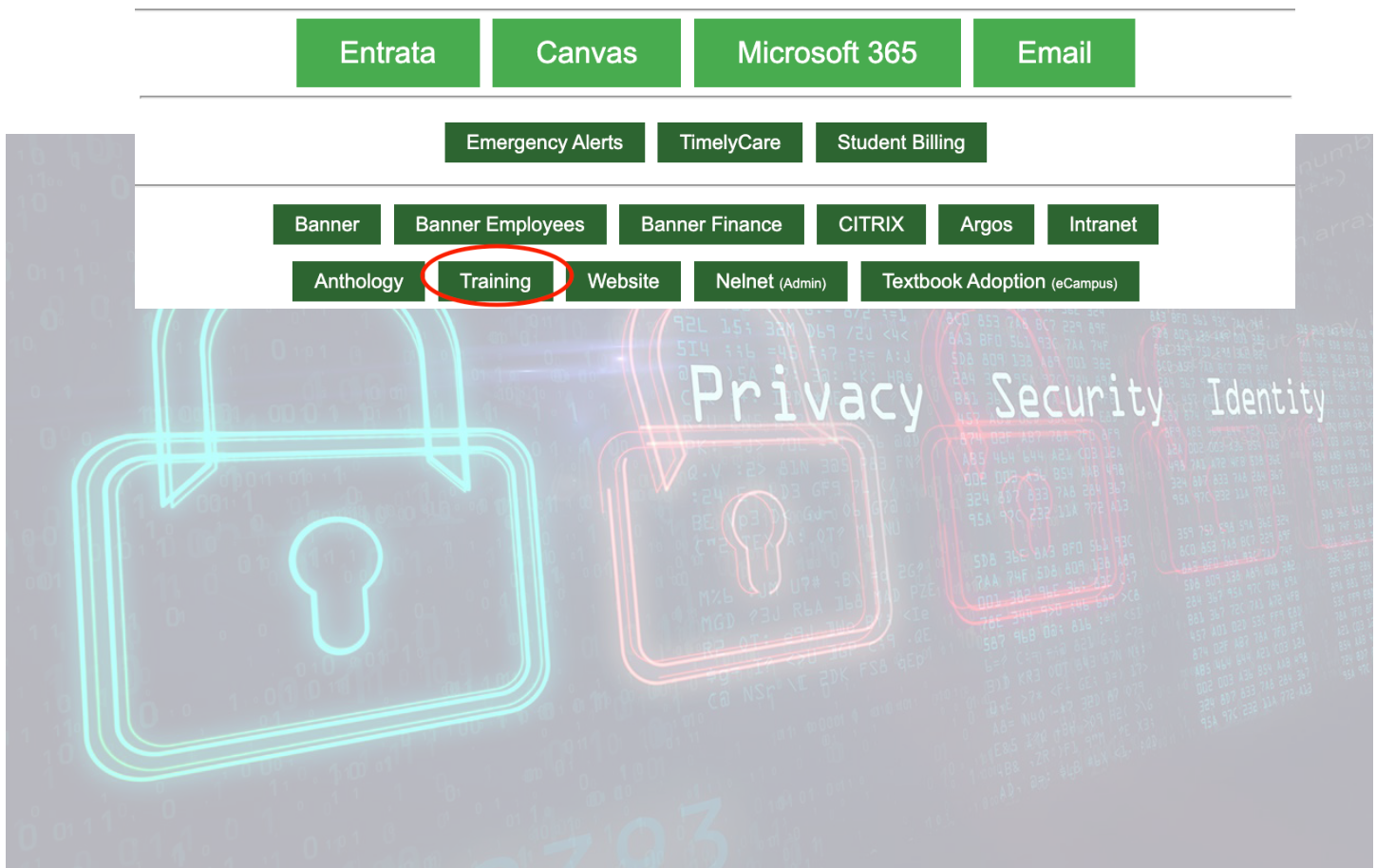
Ryan Gower, Ph.D.  
Chancellor; Illinois Eastern Community Colleges



## Identity Theft Prevention & Cybersecurity Training

Visit the [IECC Identify Theft Prevention](#) webpage to learn what identity theft is, its warning signs, how to protect yourself, and find out how to report identity theft if your information gets stolen.

**Reminder: IECC Cybersecurity training is due TODAY!** Access it through the Vector email message in your inbox or through Entrata.



The screenshot displays the Entrata system menu. The 'Training' option is highlighted with a red circle. The menu includes the following items:

- Entrata
- Canvas
- Microsoft 365
- Email
- Emergency Alerts
- TimelyCare
- Student Billing
- Banner
- Banner Employees
- Banner Finance
- CITRIX
- Argos
- Intranet
- Anthology
- Training
- Website
- Nelnet (Admin)
- Textbook Adoption (eCampus)

The background of the screenshot features a digital lock icon and the words "Privacy Security Identity".

## IECC 2026 Health Insurance Plan Updates

Each year, IECC reviews its employee health insurance plan to balance two goals: maintaining strong coverage and ensuring long-term sustainability. With national healthcare costs continuing to climb, 2026 will bring several measured, data-informed adjustments designed to protect both employees and the District's ability to offer strong health care plans.

Health insurance costs are rising across the country. Nationally, health insurance premiums are projected to rise an average of 18% in 2026, driven by increasing prices for medical services and prescription drugs. These increases affect every employer-sponsored plan, including ours. If IECC experienced the same increase that is happening nationally, our per-employee monthly premium costs would rise by roughly \$175 to \$1,135 next year—an increase that would cost the District nearly \$500,000.

Through strong management and thoughtful plan adjustments, IECC's overall health insurance increase for 2026 will instead be 8.9%, well below the original proposal of 21%. In real terms, this means the District's contribution for the base plan (Option 2) will rise to \$1,047.92 per month, an increase of \$85.64 per employee. This adds about \$240,000 to the District's operating budget. While that's a significant expense, it's a responsible outcome given current market pressures and our goal of preserving high-quality coverage.

**Beginning January 1, 2026**, IECC will continue to offer four health insurance plan options through BlueCross BlueShield (BCBS). IECC has reduced out-of-pocket premium expenses by transitioning to a Blue Choice Options (BCO) network—a more focused, cost-efficient structure that maintains strong coverage while helping control long-term costs.

### New Three-Tier Network Design:

- **Tier 1:** Blue Choice Options (BCO) Network
- **Tier 2:** PPO In-Network Providers
- **Tier 3:** Out-of-Network Providers

An analysis of IECC employee claims found that 96% of providers used by employees are already in the Tier 1 network, and over 98% of claims have historically been paid to those providers. This means most employees will not experience any change in their doctors or preferred facilities. While HIPAA regulations prevent IECC from knowing which providers employees use, information will be provided if a doctor or clinic is not in Tier 1. However, we urge employees to verify their providers on the BCBS website before receiving care.

### Additional Details

- Deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums will rise modestly for 2026 to balance affordability and plan sustainability. More detailed information will be available in Employee Navigator during Open Enrollment and on the [IECC Employment website](#).
- **Dental premiums remain unchanged**, with the District continuing to cover 100% of the employee cost. The self-only premium remains \$26.08 per month.
- There are **no changes** to vision, critical illness, accident, hospital indemnity, identity theft protection, life insurance, or long-term disability coverage.
- IECC will **continue to cover 100% of the employee premium for Option 2** (\$1,047.92 per month).
- Employees selecting Options 1, 3, or 4 will continue to receive a District contribution equal to the full cost of Option 2.
- Coverage levels and ancillary benefits remain strong, and nearly all employees will experience no disruption in benefits for care.
- IECC will **continue to make a \$1,000 Health Savings Account allocation** to qualified employees at the start of the calendar year (prorated for employees starting after January 1).

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(Health Insurance cont.)

Like most employers, IECC continues to face rising health care and energy costs, both of which have become major budget pressures nationwide. Health insurance premiums and utilities are now two of the fastest-growing expenses in higher education, and managing those costs responsibly is essential to protecting our mission and our people.

Despite a national climate of steep increases (18% is common), this year's outcome is a **positive** one: IECC successfully limited its plan increase to 8.9%, maintained full premium coverage for the base plan, and preserved comprehensive benefits with minimal disruption to employee access or choice.

Compared to our regional peers, IECC's health coverage remains among the most competitive and comprehensive in the community college system—both in plan design and District contribution. Our employees continue to have access to multiple plan options, quality providers, and stable ancillary benefits with no premium changes.

### Open Enrollment Information

Open Enrollment is taking place in [Employee Navigator](#) now until November 6, 2025.

**All full-time employees must take action during Open Enrollment to ensure continued coverage; otherwise, benefits will end January 1, 2026.** Employees have received an email from Employee Navigator and Human Resources with detailed enrollment instructions. Those who have previously enrolled will follow the same familiar process.

If you have questions about the new plan options or coverage details, Human Resources will provide additional materials and host informational sessions later this fall.

[Click here](#) to start your open enrollment.

## Vice Chancellor Town Halls

Town Halls with the IECC Vice Chancellors - VC of Business Operations, VC of Student Affairs, VC of Academic Affairs, VC of Institutional Outreach, and VC of Business and Industry - will be coming together to each campus this fall to engage in conversations with faculty and staff and to share information, promote transparency, answer questions, create collaborative opportunities, and continue to strengthen the advancement of the IECC Strategic Engagement Plan.

- **WVC - Nov 4** - 11:00 -12:00PM and 1:00 - 2:00PM, Student Services Conference Room
- **FCC - Dec 10** - 11:00 -12:00PM and 1:00 - 2:00PM, Mason Hall





## Enrollment Management Update

### IECC Recruitment Update: Fall Highlights

Fall has been a busy and exciting season for IECC recruitment! Throughout September and October, Curtis and Carrie have been on the road connecting with students, families, guidance counselors, and other educators across the district and in Indiana.

### High School Visits & College Fairs

Curtis and Carrie visited dozens of area high schools and attended regional college fairs to share information about IECC's affordable programs, transfer degrees, and career-ready pathways. From Albion to Sullivan, IN, to Robinson, students had the chance to learn about opportunities close to home that can help them reach their goals.

### Community Engagement

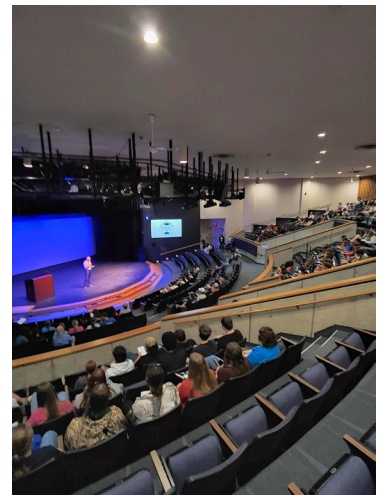
In addition to classroom visits, IECC students and staff participated in community events such as fall festivals and parades, promoting local access to higher education. Events like the Oblong Fall Follies Parade, Fairfield Fall Fun Fest, and High Five Fridays brought smiles and school spirit while building stronger connections with our communities.

### Events and Campus Visits

Special events across the district provided even more opportunities for students to connect and learn about IECC programs. Wabash Valley College hosted Diesel Day, where students got a firsthand look at the in-demand Diesel Equipment Technology program. Olney Central College welcomed future students for Blue Preview Day, where students met faculty and learned about programs in depth. Meanwhile, Lawrence County High School's Education students visited Lincoln Trail College to explore the field of education.

### Looking Ahead

The excitement doesn't stop here! As we roll into November, Curtis and Carrie are gearing up for even more school visits, campus events, and community fun. We love showing students how IECC can help them start strong, stay local, and save big on their college journey.



# TRIO

UPWARD BOUND

IECC MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2025

## • RECRUITMENT & ENGAGEMENT

Upward Bound is still actively recruiting for the academic year, with strong progress across its partner institutions. OCC leads the way with 96% of available spots filled, followed by LTC at 91%. WVC has reached 85% of its recruitment goal.

## • OCTOBER WORKSHOP

TRIO Upward Bound brought students from twelve high schools together for the October workshop at Olney Central College! Participants engaged in a full day of learning and growth with sessions on:

- Note-taking strategies
- Stress management
- Career clusters
- Financing college & FAFSA
- Understanding degree audits

We wrapped up the day with a fun round of College & Career Bingo to reinforce key concepts.

## • Quotes from our students

### 1. Academic Support

"TRIO helped me improve my study habits and stay on track with my grades."

"The tutoring and workshops gave me confidence in subjects I struggled with."

### 2. College Readiness

"TRIO guided me through the college application process and FAFSA."

"Campus visits helped me decide what kind of college environment I want."

### 3. Career Exploration

"TRIO introduced me to career options I didn't know about."

"The program helped me connect my interests to real-world careers."

### 4. Personal Growth

"TRIO gave me a support system and mentors who believe in me."

"I learned leadership skills through TRIO activities."

### 5. Financial Literacy

"I learned how to budget and understand financial aid."



## TRIO U.B. STUDENT SPOTLIGHT AIDEN MCBROOM

Meet Aiden, a Mt. Carmel High School student with an outstanding 4.0 GPA, who has excelled academically while taking dual credit courses to challenge himself even further. His dream is to pursue Aerospace Engineering, and his dedication is opening incredible doors. Aiden received nearly a perfect score on his SAT.

Aiden has already been flown out to visit some of the nation's most prestigious institutions, including Swarthmore, Williams, Brown, and Columbia, with Harvard proudly sitting at number five on his list! His journey with TRIO Upward Bound began as a freshman, and we couldn't be prouder of how far he has come.

<https://iecc.edu/trioub>

## One Click College Admit

The One Click College Admit for Illinois Residents as well the corresponding implementation of the Common App for IECC has begun. Currently students who visit the website will see **the opportunity to complete the common app once and be admitted to several state colleges and universities.**

### Overview:

Legislation ([HB3522](#)) was passed to provide Illinois High School Seniors the opportunity to enter their basic data of an Illinois address and self-reported GPA and be admitted to the majority of Illinois State Institutions of Higher Ed. For Seniors, this means they can begin the common app, and they will receive admission to several state schools.

For current juniors and later, the process will be slightly different. Juniors this year will grant the release of their end of junior year GPA using their ISAC account. This will then allow Seniors next to automatically be admitted.

- Currently 8 Illinois Community Colleges have implemented the Common Application
- **IECC will begin implementation in March of 2026 with a Go Live date of August 1, 2026**
- The Common App will not replace our current application but will enhance our outreach
- The State government has appropriated funds to assist with the implementation costs
- There will be a per application fee for the institution but the domestic application will not be charged to apply (the International application fee of \$100 will still apply)

### How will this help IECC:

- This will increase our name recognition on a State, National and International level
- Forms an alliance of Illinois Universities, Colleges, and Community Colleges to work together to encourage students to attend schools in the State of Illinois.
- Reassure students in our district their local Community College has open admissions for them.

### Items of note:

- The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Illinois at Chicago will participate but in a invitation to apply capacity rather than an automatic admissions offer.
- Community College students will begin to use the One click college admit in January 2026. More information is coming on this population.

**Please note the Common App will not be used for applicants to the following programs: Adult Education, Non-credit, Workforce Education, Business & Industry Training, nor Dual Credit.** Most local applicants and Career and Technical applicants will be encouraged to the IECC application.

[Click here](#) to learn more about Common App.





## Accessibility and ADA Title II Compliance at IECC

You may have already heard about the updates to ADA Title II that **require all public colleges to ensure their digital content is fully accessible to individuals with vision disabilities by April 24, 2026**. This mandate includes Canvas course pages, handouts, videos, PDFs, forms, and newsletters. Essentially, this means that our online courses and learning materials must be fully compliant with accessibility standards. Thankfully, we have the tools, resources, and training to make this happen!

### What This Means for Faculty

If you teach, design, or share digital materials, a few small steps can make a big difference for your students in your Digital content and Canvas shells:

- Add alt text to all images, charts, and graphics so everyone can understand the visual content.
- Provide captions and transcripts for videos and audio recordings.
- Use proper headings (H1, H2, H3) instead of bold text to organize pages and documents. Also make sure that font is in dark text, not bright colors.
- Check your PDFs to make sure they are tagged and readable for screen readers.
- Test interactive items like forms, buttons, and links to be sure they work with both a mouse and a keyboard.

### IECC Tools and Training to Help You Succeed

CETL offers several resources to make accessibility easy and approachable for everyone:

#### CETL Online Mini-Course: EDU 1611 – Creating Accessible Documents

Learn how to make Word, PowerPoint, and PDF files accessible to all learners. This short course is offered each semester in Canvas. EDU 1611 – Creating Accessible Documents

#### Accessibility AI Bot in Canvas

This new feature checks your course content and gives clear, friendly suggestions for improving accessibility, right inside your course shell. Chat bot here

#### ALLY Accessibility Tool

Every Canvas course includes the ALLY tool. It provides quick color-coded feedback on the accessibility of your files and pages and offers simple steps to fix issues. We have a guide here for utilizing Ally.

#### Accessibility is Everyone's Responsibility

Whether you're updating a syllabus, recording a lecture, or posting an announcement, each action contributes to a more inclusive learning environment. Accessibility is about empowering all learners and helping every student have a fair chance to succeed.

**Need Help or Want to Learn More?** Contact CETL at [cetl@iecc.edu](mailto:cetl@iecc.edu) for:

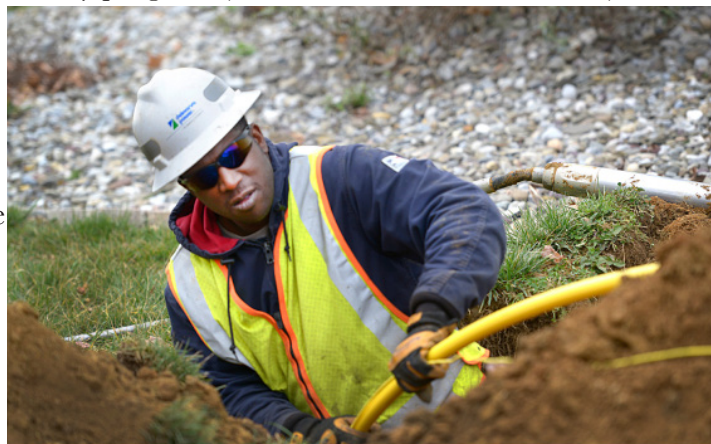
- Accessibility audits and course reviews
- One-on-one support and consultations
- Enrollment in online accessibility courses

Together, we can make sure IECC continues to lead with excellence, inclusion, and care.



## Gas Utility Construction Bootcamp

IECC Business and Industry is excited to announce a new Gas Utility Construction Bootcamp launching January 2026 at Wabash Valley College. This 10-week Saturday program (\$1,200, limited to 10 students) addresses the critical workforce shortage in natural gas utilities by providing hands-on training in gas main and service installation, safety protocols, and DOT Operator Qualifications. Led by industry veteran Jack Tribe (40+ years' experience), the bootcamp prepares participants for immediate employment with gas utilities and pipeline contractors. Sponsored by ASTAR with support from Miller Pipeline, CenterPoint Energy, Mt. Carmel Public Utility, and NPL, this program targets military veterans, displaced workers, and weekend-available adults seeking career transitions into this high-demand field. With 90 total training hours and a focus on 100% job placement, this initiative demonstrates IECC's commitment to workforce development and regional economic growth through industry-aligned training partnerships.



## SBDC Upcoming Opportunities



The SBDC celebrated a dynamic October filled with entrepreneurial energy and community partnerships. We launched the 2025 Business Plan Challenge in Robinson, generously sponsored by Gina Mills of Country Financial and Regions Bank. Three ambitious participants are now competing for an impressive \$20,000 prize package combining cash awards and in-kind services. The local pitch competition takes place November 12, 2025, where two winners will advance to the regional competition at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale on November 20th. The culminating awards ceremony will be held December 4th at SIU.

Beyond the competition, we've been busy expanding our educational offerings. In partnership with DCEO and NFIB (National Federation of Independent Businesses), we hosted a well-attended webinar on small business resources on October 22nd. The following day, we welcomed attendees to a specialized Women in Agriculture workshop at the Terry L. Bruce West Richland Center, co-hosted with DCEO. Looking ahead, we'll close out the month with an Employer Workshop on October 30th at the TLBWRC, continuing our commitment to providing practical business guidance across our region.

# NEWS AT THE COLLEGES

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*Click each newsletter to view*

The Voyager

Network LT

Knightline

View from the Valley



**FEELING OFF?**

Talk to a mental health professional 24/7.

**No waiting, no stress!**

[timelycare.com](https://timelycare.com)

**timelycare**

To submit information for upcoming IECC newsletters, please email [newsletter@iecc.edu](mailto:newsletter@iecc.edu).