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Illinois Adopts New Framework for Preparing Students for Postsecondary Education, Careers, and Financial Aid

CHICAGO -- The State of Illinois has adopted a new [Postsecondary and Career Expectations \(PaCE\) framework](#) that outlines what students should know and actions they should take from middle school through 12th grade to select the right postsecondary option, prepare for careers, and access financial aid opportunities. Through the action of their governing boards, the [Illinois State Board of Education \(ISBE\)](#), [Illinois Board of Higher Education \(IBHE\)](#), [Illinois Community College Board \(ICCB\)](#), and the [Illinois Student Assistance Commission \(ISAC\)](#) have all [adopted](#) the framework and will be using it to support and advance their efforts in these areas.

Grade level learning standards help teachers, students, and parents make sure that students are on track when it comes to learning academic concepts. But when it comes to what a student should know about life after high school—concepts like how to choose a college or what to look for when exploring careers—there has not been a similar set of grade level milestones addressing what students should know and when.

“The new PaCE guidelines offer a framework that teachers, schools, and others who work with students can use to help improve college and career readiness,” said Dr. Beth Purvis, Illinois Secretary of Education and Chair of the [Illinois P-20 Council](#). “We are pleased to support this important cross-agency effort to ensure middle and high school students have academic and work experiences that support them and their families in making well-informed plans and decisions for their adult life.”

The PaCE framework is one of four key strategies included in the [Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act \(Public Act 99-0674\)](#) (PWR Act), which unanimously passed the Illinois House and Senate in May 2016 and was signed by Governor Rauner in July 2016. The PWR Act takes a student-centered and competency-based approach to assist Illinois students to prepare for and select the right postsecondary option, and ultimately obtain meaningful employment. The PaCE framework provides an important foundation for the three other strategies implemented by the PWR Act: a new system for school districts to award college and career pathways endorsements on high school diplomas,

supporting students to avoid remediation in college through targeted math instruction during the senior year, and piloting competency-based high school graduation requirements.

The framework is intended to be used by communities to organize their activities around postsecondary education and career readiness and financial aid supports. While the PWR Act does not require school districts to adopt it, state agencies will use PaCE to organize their supports in these areas to local communities.

For example, ISAC is using PaCE as a framework to guide the assistance it delivers through a recently awarded seven-year, \$18.6 million federal [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs](#) (GEAR UP) grant that will provide services to approximately 30,500 students in 25 middle schools and 25 high schools across Illinois. ISAC is also supporting the work of the [Northern Illinois University P-20 Center](#) in the creation of professional development modules on the PaCE framework for administrators and school counselors. In addition, the [Northern Illinois Regional P-20 Network](#) has created tools to help implement the PaCE Framework, especially *On PaCE to Thrive: A Guide to Community Action for College and Career Readiness*, which provides activities to be shared by stakeholders in each community.

PaCE was developed through a multi-year process led by the Illinois P-20 Council's College and Career Readiness Committee. The advisory committee that developed PaCE included over 30 members from across the State representing school counselors, district administrators, universities, community colleges, teacher, employers, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations.

While PaCE was not officially adopted until this month, some Illinois school districts have already begun to implement it.

"Our district has done a significant amount of work on college and career readiness, and we have found PaCE to be a great modeling tool to build on that work," said Dr. Travis L. McGuire, Superintendent of [Hinkley-Big Rock CUSD #429](#). "The flexibility of the framework has allowed us to identify and implement important components aligned to our local needs and resources."

ISBE will be live on Facebook at 3 pm on Wednesday, June 28, to answer questions about PaCE at www.facebook.com/IllinoisStateBoardofEducation. ISBE Director of Community Partnerships and Secondary Transformation Mary Reynolds and Illini Central CUSD 189 Superintendent Mike Ward will share how they envision using the framework to help all students prepare for college and career.

The official PaCE framework is available at https://www.isbe.net/Documents/PaCE_Revisions.pdf. Resources for PaCE and other aspects of the PWR Act are available at www.pwract.org.

About the Illinois Board of Higher Education

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) is the state's agency for planning and coordination of higher education, including connecting the needs of the state's workforce with college degrees and postsecondary training programs. www.ibhe.org

About the Illinois Community College Board

The Illinois Community College Board is the state coordinating board for community colleges. Illinois is home to 48 community colleges in 39 districts and has the third largest community college system in the nation serving close to 1 million residents each year in credit and noncredit courses. www.iccb.org

About the Illinois Student Assistance Commission

The mission of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) is to help make college accessible and affordable for students throughout Illinois. ISAC provides comprehensive, objective, and timely information on education and financial aid for students and their families--giving them access to the tools they need to make the educational choices that are right for them. Then, through the state scholarship and grant programs ISAC administers, ISAC can help students make those choices a reality. www.isac.org

About the Illinois State Board of Education

The mission of the Illinois State Board of Education is to provide leadership and resources to achieve excellence across all Illinois districts through engaging legislators, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in formulating and advocating for policies that enhance education, empower districts, and ensure equitable outcomes for all students. ISBE envisions Illinois as state of whole, healthy children nested in whole, healthy systems supporting communities wherein all citizens are socially and economically secure. www.isbe.net

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