



ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGES GENERATE \$27.2 BILLION IN ANNUAL ECONOMIC IMPACT, SUPPORTING MORE THAN 324,000 JOBS

New study highlights strong return on investment for students, taxpayers, and the state economy

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SPRINGFIELD (April 16, 2026) — Illinois' community colleges are a powerful driver of the state's economy, generating **\$27.2 billion in total economic impact** and supporting **324,273 jobs statewide**, according to a newly released economic impact study.

The report, [*The Economic Value of the Community Colleges of Illinois*](#), reflects fiscal year 2023–24 data and underscores the critical role Illinois' 45 community colleges play in workforce development, business growth, and economic mobility across the state.

“Here in Illinois, we understand the unique value of our community colleges. By expanding access to education, we're transforming students' lives, strengthening regional industries, and boosting economic momentum statewide,” said **Governor JB Pritzker**. “This study highlights how community colleges play a critical role in strengthening our world-class workforce and growing our economy.”

The study finds that Illinois community colleges contribute to the economy through operations, construction, student spending, and — most significantly — the long-term success of their graduates.

Alumni impact alone accounts for **\$25 billion in added income** to the state economy.

“Illinois community colleges are one of the smartest investments we can make in our state's future,” said **ICCB Executive Director Brian Durham**. “This study makes it clear — our colleges are not only transforming lives through education, but they are also strengthening Illinois' economy, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs, and delivering real returns for taxpayers and communities across the state.”

The study was conducted by [Lightcast](#), in partnership with the Illinois Community College Board, Illinois Council of Community College Presidents, the Illinois Community College Trustees Association, and the Illinois Community College System Foundation.

“Illinois community colleges are engines of workforce and economic development —expanding opportunity, transforming lives, and strengthening the future of our state. Every day, we prepare learners for high-demand careers while advancing the economic vitality of our regions. This study reinforces a critical truth—sustained investment in community colleges fuels economic resilience, workforce innovation to support employers, and transformational opportunities for generations to come,” **said Dr. Avis Proctor, President of Harper College.**

Key Findings from the study:

- **\$27.2 billion** total economic impact in Illinois
- **324,273 jobs supported** — equal to **1 out of every 26 jobs statewide**
- **\$1.8 billion** generated through college operations
- **\$385.5 million** added through student spending
- **\$25 billion** in economic impact from alumni contributions
- **538,541 students served** during FY 2023–24

The study also highlights strong returns on investment for key stakeholders:

- **Students** receive **\$4.30 in lifetime earnings** for every \$1 invested
- **Taxpayers** receive **\$1.30 for every \$1 invested**
- **Society** sees a return of **\$6.70 for every \$1 invested**

“This report clearly demonstrates that Illinois community colleges are among the most effective investments our state can make. The return is not only measured in economic impact, but in stronger communities, a more competitive workforce, and expanded opportunities for students across Illinois. Our colleges deliver value at every level — for students, for taxpayers, and for the future of our state,” **said Jim Reed, President of the Illinois Community College Trustee’s Association.**

“Philanthropic support plays a vital role in expanding access and opportunity across Illinois’ community college system. This study underscores the profound impact our colleges have—not only on students, but on communities and the state’s economic future. Through strategic investment and partnership, we can continue to remove barriers, strengthen workforce pathways, and ensure more Illinoisans have the opportunity to succeed,” **said Dr. Barry Hancock, Co-President of the Illinois Community College System Foundation.**

In addition to economic impact, the study reinforces the role community colleges play in advancing workforce readiness, increasing earning potential, and improving quality of life for Illinois residents. The average associate degree graduate earns **\$8,400 more annually** than a high school graduate, contributing to long-term economic growth and stability.

Illinois community colleges serve as critical partners to business and industry, providing a steady pipeline of skilled workers while supporting regional economies through direct spending, job creation, and increased productivity.

For complete study results, visit: <https://www.ilcommunitycolleges.org/news-media/economic-impact/>

About the Illinois Community College Board

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is the state coordinating organization for the Illinois Community College System — the third largest in the nation and the leading provider of public workforce training in Illinois. The ICCB administers state and federal grants to community college districts and adult education providers and supports programs that expand access to high-quality, affordable education and training opportunities. Illinois community colleges serve more than 500,000 residents annually across 45 colleges in 39 districts.

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