

# Elgin Community College

## Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan

### 2025-2027

#### Table of Contents

|                                           |    |
|-------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary                         | 2  |
| I. Institutional Context                  | 4  |
| II. Current Enrollment Landscape          | 8  |
| III. Strategic Enrollment Goals           | 12 |
| IV. Institutional Capacity & Resources    | 15 |
| V. Implementation & Accountability        | 15 |
| VI. Additional Resources (in development) | 17 |
| Financial Impact Modeling                 | 17 |



Elgin  
Community  
College

Fall 2025

## Executive Summary

Elgin Community College's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan for 2025–2027 is a bold, future-oriented roadmap designed to ensure sustainable enrollment growth, institutional resilience, and equitable student success in an increasingly complex higher education landscape. Rooted in ECC's mission to "improve lives through learning," this plan is both responsive to anticipated enrollment challenges and proactive in positioning the College as a regional leader in access, innovation, and economic development.

## The Challenge and Opportunity

ECC is navigating a rapidly shifting environment marked by:

- A projected 31% decline in Illinois high school graduates through 2041—one of the steepest drops among U.S. states ([WICHE, 2025](#))
- A declining high school-to-college matriculation rate, which nationally fell from 70% to 62% between 2016 and 2022 ([NCES, 2024](#))
- Persistent equity gaps in dual credit access
- A growing but under-leveraged population of adult, ESL, GED, and Continuing Education learners

In the face of these structural headwinds, ECC's SEM Plan recognizes that enrollment growth must come not only from traditional pipelines but also through strategic innovation, community alignment, and student-centered design.

## Strategic Focus Areas

This SEM Plan articulates three institutional goals, each supported by targeted strategies, innovative tactics to explore, and performance indicators:

### Streamline Credit Enrollment Processes

- Reengineering and perform critical analysis of onboarding processes using Salesforce CRM applications and virtual support tools
- Key metrics: Establish baseline then reduce time from Inquiry-to-Application; (The 2025 to 2027 goal will be to establish a comprehensive data system--a data warehouse--for developing an inquiry-to-application pipeline data). Establish baseline then reduce time from Application-to-Registration; Increase in Application-to-Registration yield.

### Recruit New Students Across Key Populations

- Tailored outreach to adult learners (25 years and older), new students, ESL/GED learners, Continuing Education learners, and historically underserved communities

- Exploration of pilot innovations such as micro-scholarships for returning and near-completers, increased Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) opportunities, and an Adult Reengagement Hub
- Key metrics: Increase in adult learner (25 years and older) enrollment, from **39% of our students in AY2025** to **45% by AY2027**; Increase in new student (First-time in College) enrollment from **21% of our students in AY2025** to **25% by AY2027**; Increase among students with some college/no degree enrollment.

### **Retain and Support Current Students**

- Scaling of predictive analytics for resource allocation and targeted student supports, “Just One More” advising campaign, completion grant programs, and available resource communication.
- Integration of comprehensive degree plans for more students and expanded student case management.
- Key metrics: Increase in student retention among key populations; Increase in students with certificate and degree completion plans in the first semester; Increase completion rate among all students.

# I. Institutional Context

## Mission and Strategic Priorities

ECC's Mission is to Improve Lives Through Learning. Through our decisions and actions, we empower:

- **Students** to reach their goals in an equitable and welcoming environment;
- **Employees** to thrive and fully use their collective talents, and
- **Our Community** to transform and enriches the world.

Our Strategic Priorities (2023-2027) are guided by four Key Imperatives:

### 1. Teaching and Learning Excellence

Deliver instructional practices and curriculum to ensure student-centered learning

### 2. Lifelong Connections

Create a lifelong meaningful, and mutual relationship with the college

### 3. ECC Experience

Cultivate a welcoming destination for students, employees, and our community

### 4. Fortify Our Future

Position the college to remain affordable while ensuring long-term financial stability and operational efficiency

Within these Key Imperatives, there are strategic goals supported directly by the elements of this SEM plan. The most relevant of these include:

|                               |                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Goal 1: Completion            | Increase the average number of credits earned per student                                                   |
| Goal 3: Enrollment            | Increase total annual unduplicated enrollment                                                               |
| Goal 4: Credit Accumulation   | Increase total annual credit hour count                                                                     |
| Goal 5: Student Experience    | Increase the number of unique students who participate in at least one of 16 targeted engagement activities |
| Goal 8: Student Affordability | Decrease the number of students with unmet need                                                             |

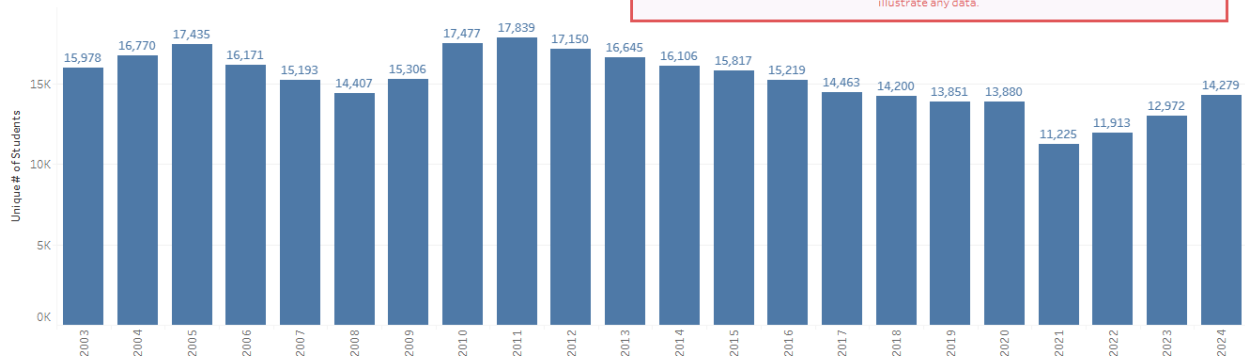
To support the institution's strategic goals, the objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) of this SEM plan will be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure continued progress toward successful goal achievement.

# Current State Enrollment Overview

## Annual Enrollment

Total unduplicated headcount enrollment reached a high in 2011, following the economic recession of 2008. The COVID-19 pandemic reduced enrollment significantly in 2021, but the College experienced a strong enrollment recovery period since then, surpassing pre-pandemic enrollment in 2024.

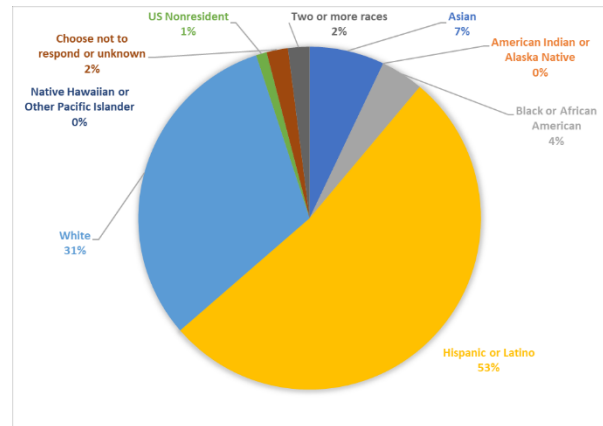
10th Day Enrollments - Total (All)



## Student Profile (fall 2024)

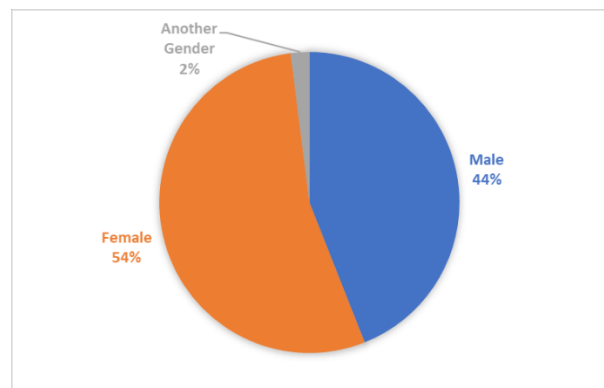
### Race and Ethnicity

As a Hispanic Serving Institution, more than half of ECC students identify as Hispanic/Latino/x in 2025. Around a third of ECC students identify as White, 7% as Asian, 4% as Black or African American, 3% as Two or More Races, and 2% as Other Races/Ethnicities.



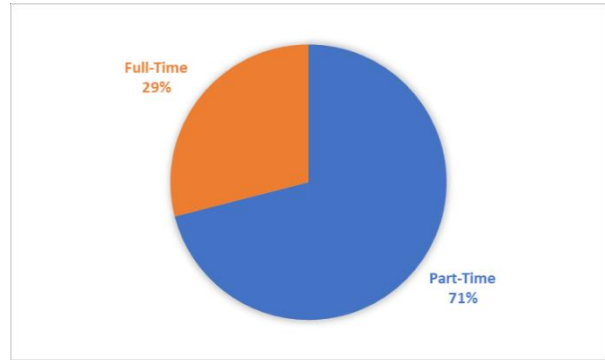
### Gender

Students who identify as female comprise most of our student population at 54%, with male students and those who identify as another gender making up 44% and 2%, respectively.



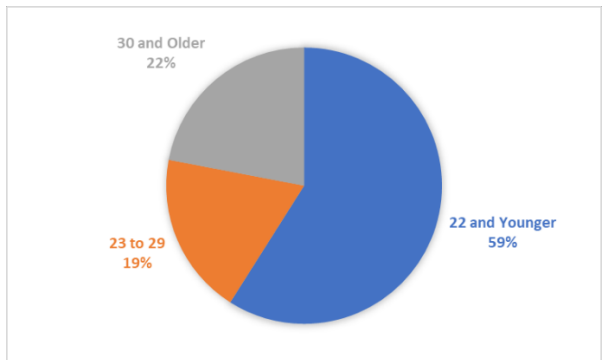
### ***Full-time / Part-time***

Approximately 29% of ECC students enroll full-time (taking 12 or more credit hours), while the majority—71%—attend part-time. These figures can fluctuate, as about 20% of students switch between full-time and part-time enrollment at some point during their time with us.



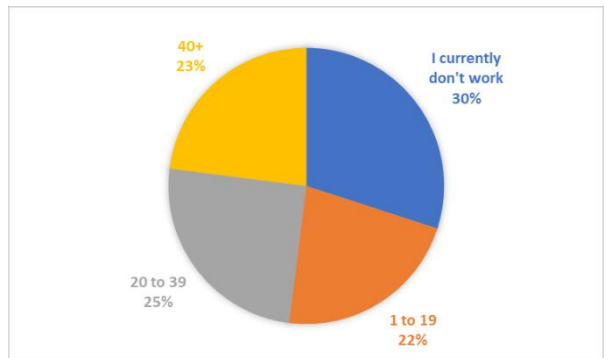
### ***Age***

While a majority of ECC students are of “traditional” college age (22 and younger), a full 19% are ages 23-29, and 22% are 30 or older.



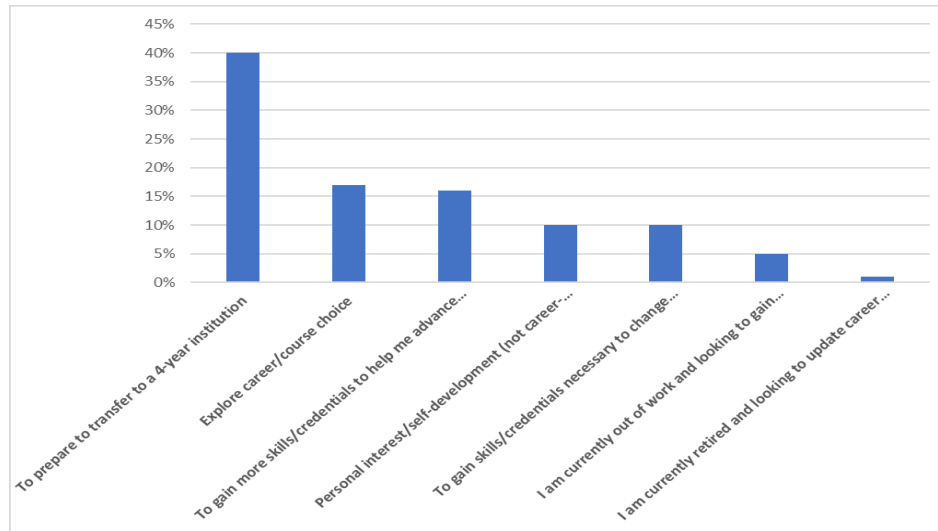
### ***Employment Status***

The majority of ECC students—around 70%—report holding a job while attending college. Among those who work, 47% are employed part-time (less than 40 hours per week), while 23% balance full-time employment (40 hours or more per week) with their studies.



## Reasons for Attending ECC

Students come to ECC to satisfy a wide range of academic, career, and personal needs. The majority (40%) attend with the primary goal of earning a degree that will help them transfer to a university to complete a bachelor's degree. Other students are here to explore career options and programs or earn credentials or skills to help them advance in their current career (17% and 16%, respectively), among other reasons.



## Other Relevant Student Information

At ECC:

- 64% of students report that English is the primary language spoken in their home
- Among students who do not primarily speak English at home, 82% speak Spanish
- 76% identify as single
- More than one-quarter of students identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community
- 15% of students serve as primary caretakers for their own children
- 17% care for siblings or other relatives.
- 52% of students use their own funds to pay for college, and 43% rely on financial aid.

## II. Current Enrollment Landscape

### Key Challenges

- National and state-wide “Enrollment Cliff” trends, leading to declining high school-to-college matriculation rates
- Limited conversion of GED, ESL, and Continuing Education learners into certificate and degree pathways
- Underrepresentation of diverse student communities within Dual Credit offerings; predominance of part-time Dual Credit students
- Fragmented visibility and utilization of student resources and student support services

### National and State-wide “Enrollment Cliff” Trends

Community colleges across the country are facing the dual threat of declining high school graduate populations and a reduced rate of matriculation into postsecondary education. Nationally, the college-going rate for high school graduates has declined from 70% in 2016 to 62% in 2022, reflecting both a cultural shift and affordability concerns ([NCES, 2023](#)).

The issue is especially acute in Illinois. According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), Illinois is projected to experience a 31% decline in high school graduates between 2025 and 2041—one of the steepest declines among major U.S. states ([WICHE, 2025](#)). This “enrollment cliff” means that ECC’s traditional recruitment pipeline may shrink, both in volume and in yield.

### *Recruitment and Retention Focus*

ECC must intensify efforts to recruit and retain students from under-tapped populations, including:

- Adult learners
- Stop-outs (students who left ECC without a certificate or degree) and returning students
- Other underserved communities

### *Statewide Context*

Illinois community colleges, collectively, saw a 7.4% enrollment rebound from Fall 2023 to Fall 2024 ([ICCB, 2024](#)), primarily driven by:

- Dual credit enrollment
- Adult education programs

### *Strategic Implication*

This short-term growth masks structural demographic declines that threaten long-term enrollment stability.



### ***Recommended Shift***

ECC must transition its strategic enrollment approach from *reactive to proactive* to mitigate the risks associated with these trends.

### **Limited Conversion of GED, ESL, and Continuing Education Learners into Certificate and Degree Pathways**

ECC serves a robust population of adult learners through its Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language (ESL), and Continuing Education programs. However, internal data shows that a limited number of students enrolled in these programs, particularly those in ESL, transition into college-level certificate or degree pathways—a significant missed opportunity for both student advancement and institutional enrollment growth.

#### ***Enrollment Growth***

Adult Education enrollments increased by 17.1% statewide in 2023–2024, signaling greater educational demand and engagement ([ICCB, 2024](#)).

#### ***Persistent Barriers***

Despite growth, the pathway from Adult Education and Continuing Education to college-level enrollment remains underdeveloped at many institutions, including ECC.

Key barriers include:

- Limited access of academic and career advising
- Unclear alignment between adult education and college curricula
- Lack of clarity around career outcomes

### ***Strategic Priorities for ECC***

The Strategic Enrollment Management Plan must prioritize:

- Clear academic and career pathways
- Contextualized learning experiences
- Intensive transition support for adult learners

### ***Equity and Opportunity***

Aligning adult education and Continuing Education with college-level credentials is both an equity imperative and a strategic opportunity to strengthen enrollment and student success.

### **Underrepresentation of Diverse Student Communities within Dual Credit Offerings; Predominance of Part-Time Dual Credit Students**

Dual Credit has emerged as a key growth area for Illinois community colleges, with participation statewide increasing by 20% between 2023 and 2024 ([ICCB, 2024](#)). ECC has participated in similar growth trends within our Dual Credit offerings. However, persistent equity gaps remain in who accesses and benefits from these programs. ECC internal analysis shows that Latinx and Black students are underrepresented in our full-time dual credit program. Also, most of ECC's

dual credit students are enrolled part-time, which limits their ability to build momentum toward degree completion.

### ***Statewide Trends***

A [2023 Illinois Board of Higher Education \(IBHE\) report](#) found that students of color are less likely to access or participate in early college credit programs.

Common Barriers (from national analyses):

- Insufficient college and career guidance
- Lack of reliable transportation to campus
- Inconsistent dual credit course offerings across high schools

### ***Strategic Response for ECC***

Continue to build upon our equity-centered approach to expanding dual credit opportunities.

Focus efforts on:

- Full-time, relevant programming
- Strategic partnerships with schools serving high proportions of historically underrepresented students

### ***Pathway Development***

Create clear dual credit-to-degree pathways with:

- Embedded academic and support services (at both high school campuses and ECC)
- Frictionless transitions into postsecondary education

### ***Institutional Alignment***

These efforts support ECC's Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) identity and advance its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) commitments.

## **Fragmented Visibility of Student Resources and Student Support Services**

Despite offering a broad array of high-impact student support services—including but not limited to: Spartan Alert/Early Alert, Wellness support, robust Athletics, Student Life, Financial Aid & Scholarships, academic support, and Student Success Coaches—ECC continues to struggle with fragmented visibility and inconsistent awareness of these resources among students. Students report feeling unaware of available support until after they have experienced academic or personal setbacks.

### ***Impact of Support Services***

- According to the [Center for Community College Student Engagement \(CCCSE\)](#), students who are aware of and use support services are twice as likely to persist and complete their programs.
- However, awareness and usage remains uneven, particularly among first-generation and part-time students — the majority of ECC's student population.

### ***Strategic Imperative for ECC***

ECC's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) plan must prioritize consolidating the student support ecosystem through:

- Technology usage and integration
- Proactive student communication and outreach

### ***Key Solutions***

- Launch a unified student services portal
- Embed AI-supported chatbots and nudges into platforms such as D2L and the MyECC Student Engagement App
- Refine and expand the holistic case management advising model

### ***Institutional Benefits***

Improved visibility and coordination of support resources:

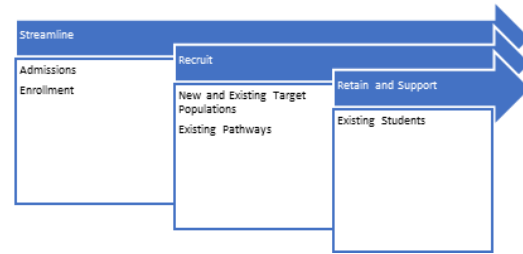
- Enhances the overall student experience, and connects students with essential resources early and often
- Directly contributes to higher student success and persistence, greater satisfaction, and enrollment stability

# III. Strategic Enrollment Goals

## Focus Populations

This plan prioritizes both traditional and non-traditional students across key populations. Many of the strategies and tactics described below—representing nationally recognized high-impact practices— support engagement with all populations, albeit by different means.

- First Time in College (FTIC)
- Adult Learners
- Some College, No Degree / Stop-Outs
- Parents and Military-Connected
- Latinx and African American/Black Students
- Workforce Education / Continuing Education
- GED and ESL Students



## Goal 1: Streamline Enrollment Processes

### Strategies

- All Students
  - Fully implement Application and Admissions Salesforce CRM workflows, communication tracks, milestone tracking
  - Audit application and enrollment processes to identify and eliminate obstacles, bottlenecks, and drop-off points
  - Gather student feedback and recommendations on application, enrollment, and onboarding processes

### Innovative Tactics to Explore

- Introduce “Enrollment Concierge” model to support high-need students
- Launch multilingual, chatbot-enabled/enhanced virtual assistant software

### Key Performance Indicators

- Establish baseline, then reduce time from Inquiry-to-Application
- Increase in Application-to-Enrollment yield, from **42% to 45% in FY 2027**
- Establish baseline, then reduce time from Application-to-Enrollment
- Establish student enrollment process satisfaction survey

## Goal 2: Recruit new Students

### Strategies

- First Time in College (FTIC) Students
  - Recruitment activities in middle and high schools
  - Campus Open House events such as Experience ECC and College Night
  - Family-friendly on-campus events
  - Community marketing campaigns
- Adult/Non-Traditional Students
  - Study population need for expanded evening/weekend class offerings
  - Study population need for fully online/hybrid certificate/degree offerings
  - Expansion of relevant Prior Learning Assessment opportunities
  - Conduct targeted outreach, expanded partnerships with employers, community organizations, and college events like Adult Information Sessions
- Workforce Education/Continuing Education, GED, and ESL into College-Level
  - Expand bridge programming (Intensive English to Dev Ed Literacy or English)
  - Recruitment from Continuing Education, GED, and ESL classes
- Latinx and African American/Black Students
  - Culturally cognizant recruitment and marketing
  - Community-based recruitment and referral pipelines

### Innovative Tactics to Explore

- Micro-scholarships for adults enrolling after 3+ year gap, to encourage re-entry and momentum
- Establishment of Adult Reengagement Hub, normalizing adult enrollment and providing relevant support

### Key Performance Indicators

- Increase in adult learner (25 years and older) enrollment from **39% of our students in AY2025 to 45% by AY2027**
- Increase First Time in College (FTIC) students from **21% of our students in AY2025 to 25% by AY2027**
- Increase African American/Black student enrollment from **5% of our student in AY2025 to 8% by AY2027**
- Increase GED students enrolling in college-level within one year of program completion
- Increase ESL students enrolling in college-level within one year of program completion
- Increase in Continuing Education students enrolling in college-level within one year of program completion

## Goal 3: Retain and Support Existing Students

### Strategies

- Scale “Just One More” advising campaign to more advising interactions, with relevant support
- Provide students with full degree plan to completion, encouraging math in first term if applicable; establish tracking mechanism
- Leverage predictive academic risk score to enhance Spartan Success early alert efforts
- Increase awareness of financial aid and scholarship opportunities
- Increase awareness of and access to student support resources

### Innovative Tactics to Explore

- Scale completion grants for students within 15 credits of graduation (such as the successful ECC Foundation supported “Compete to Complete” program)

### Key Performance Indicators

- Increase fall-to-spring student retention among Latinx students from **78% to 83% by FY2027**
- Increase fall-to-spring student retention among African American/Black students from **64% to 69% by FY2027**
- Increase among all new students with certificate and degree completion plans in first semester from **74% to 77% by FY2027**
- Increase overall student completion rate from **41% to 45% by FY2027**
- Increase average credit count per student each semester
- Increase student participation in targeted engagement activities (FY2026 College Goal #5)

## IV. Institutional Capacity & Resources

To achieve the ambitious goals set forth in this SEM plan, ECC must ensure that the institutional capacity—including technological infrastructure, human capital, and resource allocation—is strategically aligned and sufficiently resourced.

### Technology Enhancements Needed

- Tableau data dashboard enhancements and access (in progress), providing further access to real-time and relevant data for decision making
- CRM (Salesforce and Advise) utilization enhancements (in progress), allowing us to leverage existing technology to better connect with and support students efficiently

### Additional Resource Recommendations

- Tuition-incentives (i.e., micro scholarships, Complete-to-Compete program support) financial support in collaboration with the ECC Foundation
- Student transportation assistance (in progress)

### Operational Recommendations

- Strategic staffing analysis, ensuring existing positions (and their placement) are relevant to support our current goals and the quickly evolving nature of higher education

## V. Implementation & Accountability

To ensure success, ECC will adopt a structured, transparent, and participatory approach to SEM plan implementation. This includes a clear governance framework, robust communication strategy, and timely progress monitoring.

### Governance Model

- Strategic Enrollment Management Core Team
  - Mark Branson, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer (joined Oct. 2025)
  - Philip Garber, Vice President of Planning, Institutional Effectiveness & Technology
  - Maureen Jouhet, Interim Chief Marketing & Communications Officer (until Oct. 2025)
  - John Long, Associate Vice President of Student Services & Development
  - Lauren Nehlsen, Associate Dean of Recruitment, Outreach, & Global Engagement
  - Amy Perrin, Dean of Enrollment & Student Financial Services
  - Dave Rudden, Managing Director of Institutional Research
  - Ashley Zeman, Senior Director of Marketing Strategy
- Tactic/KPI Subcommittees

- As relevant and needed
- SEM Cabinet Sponsor
  - Philip Garber, Vice President of Planning, Institutional Effectiveness & Technology

## External Alignment

### Illinois Community College Board

This SEM Plan advances the state-level [goals of the ICCB](#) by:

- Advancing equity for minority, first-generation, and low-income students by implementing evidence-based practices that improve outcomes and close equity gaps across diverse communities.
- Strengthening student transitions into college and careers by promoting engagement, equitable access, and successful postsecondary and workforce outcomes.
- Driving economic development in Illinois through workforce training, credential attainment, and the creation and promotion of high-quality career pathways.

### Higher Learning Commission

This SEM Plan aligns with the goals of the HLC, particularly as it relates to the [accreditation criteria 3D, 3G, 4B, and 4C](#).

- **Criteria 3D**  
The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments, and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission. The rigor and quality of each educational program is consistent regardless of modality, location, or other differentiating factors.
- **Criteria 3G**  
The institution's student success outcomes show continuous improvement, considering the student populations it serves and benchmarks that reference peer institutions.
- **Criteria 4B**  
The institution's financial and personnel resources effectively support its current operations. The institution's financial management balances short-term needs with long-term commitments and ensures its ongoing sustainability.
- **Criteria 4C**  
The institution engages in systematic strategic planning for quality improvement. It relies on data, integrating its insights from enrollment forecasts, financial capacity, student learning assessment, institutional operations, and the external environment.

### Overarching KPIs and Evaluation

- Enrollment: Increase in overall enrollment from fall 2025 to fall 2027



- Credit Accumulation: Increase overall credit accumulation from fall 2025 to fall 2027
- Retention: Increase in fall-to-fall persistence
- Completion: Increase in annual completion from fall 2025 to fall 2027

### **Communication Plan**

Introduced to the campus community on Opening Day, fall 2025, an annual SEM Progress Report will be developed and shared annually.

### **Continuous Improvement**

The SEM Core Team will engage in an annual review and updating of this SEM Plan, identifying opportunities for feedback integration (from students and other stakeholders).

## **VI. Additional Resources (in development)**

### **Financial Impact Modeling**

To ensure transparency and fiscal responsibility, ECC is developing a financial impact model that will assist in forecasting revenue gains from increased enrollment, retention, and underserved market penetration. This modeling may include itemized projections and ROI calculations to support annual budget planning and institutional resource allocation.