



Illinois Career Pathways Initiative

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Illinois Career Pathways: Vision and Goals October 2003

The Problem

Illinois faces an impending economic crisis characterized by an increasing mismatch between employer needs and the skills of the current and emerging workforce. To make Illinois competitive and economically viable, and to ensure that working families can achieve economic self-sufficiency, we must solve this mismatch.

Employer Needs	The Illinois Workforce
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A skilled workforce with strong literacy and numeracy skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly half (47 percent) of Illinois adults have functional basic skills below that of the average high school graduate.¹ Over a quarter of a million Illinois residents (289,622) of ages 18-24 do not have a high school diploma or GED (ranking below the national and Midwest averages).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By 2006, nearly two-thirds of all jobs will require workers to have some education beyond high school, even for jobs at the entry level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illinois ranks below the national average and the average for Midwest states in the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with some college or an associate degree.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A diverse workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Illinois, 40 percent of white 18-24 year olds enroll in college compared to 21 percent for all other races.² African-Americans and Hispanics represent a progressively smaller share of students and graduates at higher degree levels.³

A Vision for Change

Illinois will remain economically competitive and Illinois employers will benefit because people at all skill and ability levels will be able to move along clearly defined, well-connected, and accessible educational pathways into good-paying jobs in sectors of importance to local and regional economies.

Achieving the Vision Through Career Pathways

A career pathway is a set of connected courses and programs which enables students to combine school and work and advance over time to better jobs and higher levels of

¹ National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), 1992 (latest data available).

² The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, "Measuring Up 2002: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education," 2002.

³ Jenkins (2003) using 2001 data from the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

education and training, including four-year degrees. Career pathways target high-wage jobs in key economic sectors and explicitly address business and industry needs by providing employers with a well-prepared workforce. The framework of career pathways is the regional and local economy, while the focus is on increasing the access of Illinois residents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to these opportunities.

Some key features of career pathways are as follows:

- ✓ Regional partnerships of community colleges and other educational institutions, workforce, human service and economic development agencies, unions, and employer groups working in concert to support worker advancement and meet employer needs, especially critical workforce skill shortages.
- ✓ “Road maps,” jointly produced by educators and employers, showing the connections between education and training programs and jobs in a given sector at different levels, and communicated to the student and potential student audience.
- ✓ Easy articulation and transferability of credits across educational institutions, and clear connections that address current gaps among remedial, occupational, and academic programs within institutions, to enable students to progress seamlessly from one level to the next and earn degrees while improving their career prospects.
- ✓ Curriculum defined in terms of competencies required for jobs and further education at the next level, and, where possible, tied to industry skill standards, certifications or licensing requirements.
- ✓ “Bridge programs” for educationally disadvantaged students that teach basic skills like communication, math, teamwork, and problem-solving in the context of training for jobs.
- ✓ Programs offered at times and places (including workplaces) convenient to working adults and structured in small modules or “chunks,” each leading to a recognized credential, to enable students to enter and exit education as their circumstances permit.
- ✓ “Wrap-around” support services, including career assessment and counseling, financial aid, tutoring, child care, transportation, case management, and job placement.
- ✓ Information to track student progress and measure outcomes.

A Strategy Response: Building Educational Pathways to Careers. A key cause of the gaps in Illinois’ education system is that there are few clear connections within and among institutions and programs that would guide and support students from one level of education to the next and into career-path jobs. For example, college remedial programs

may help students place into college-level English or math, but often fail to equip students with the basic toolbox of skills and attitudes needed to complete college degrees. Similarly, adult literacy programs too often fail to prepare students to advance to college-level programs. Too many degree programs, even in occupational fields, are designed without input from employers and therefore fall short of preparing graduates to meet the learning demands of good jobs in today's workplace.

Negotiating such a fragmented system is especially difficult for first-generation college students (of whom a disproportionate number are minority students) and adults who are working in low-wage jobs and trying to support families. The result is that too many students fall through the cracks and drop out without realizing their potential for education or careers.

Public policies and funding streams too often serve to reinforce these disconnects in practice. Rather than increase fragmentation, public policies should promote connections among education programs in ways that create pathways by which students can advance to higher levels of education and employment in fields of importance to the economic future of the state. Illinois needs to take a holistic approach to this problem and rethink its public system of education in ways that create coherent pathways to good jobs and further education and training for Illinois residents. These efforts should focus on the gaps in the system that prevent too many residents from advancing to higher education and family-supporting jobs and thereby threaten the state's economic future.

Illinois' community colleges need to be central to any effort to create educational pathways to careers for the state's residents. In fiscal 2001, the state's 48 community colleges served nearly 1 million residents, with over half a million in credit coursework. Community colleges enroll 41 percent of the African-Americans and 38 percent of the Hispanics who are in degree programs (at any level) in the state. Community colleges offer English-as-a-Second-Language training for tens of thousands from the state's burgeoning immigrant population. While data are not available from the Illinois Board of Higher Education on the income and job status of students in the state, 60 percent of Illinois community college students are enrolled part-time, compared to only 14 percent of undergraduates at the state's public universities. Forty-two percent of community college degree program students are over the age of 24, compared to only 18 percent of undergraduates at Illinois' public universities.

Community colleges have multi-faceted missions that include providing the first two years of study toward a bachelor's degree, responding to the workforce needs of local employers through college-credit and non-credit offerings, and offering literacy and remedial instruction for adults lacking basic skills or a high school credential. To the extent that community colleges create connections among these various missions – academic transfer, workforce, and remedial – they build pathways by which students, especially those with limited education and skills can advance to higher levels of both education and employment.

Our Focus

Within our broad goal of ensuring Illinois' economic future through a Career Pathways system, we have identified two initial focuses and associated outcomes:

- *Desired Outcome:* Reduce reliance on public welfare and services, increase the number of taxpayers, and provide a supply of workers to fill entry-level skilled jobs.
- *Focus:* Help low-literate, poorly educated workers who are stuck in low-wage jobs or out of work to advance to better jobs with a future.
- *Desired Outcome:* Ensure Illinois' competitiveness by building the skills of the workforce and thus improving workforce productivity (which supports rising average incomes) and attracting and retaining high-wage employers in the state.
- *Focus:* Increase the number of low-income students, particularly African-American and Hispanic students, who earn advanced certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor's degrees in high-wage fields of importance to local economies and the state.

How We Will Do This

A special emphasis of this initiative will be on strengthening the role of community colleges as the linchpin in a career pathways system. The Illinois community college system is the state's major skills development and higher education preparation institution, particularly for low-income workers. The proposed initiative will work to better connect Illinois community colleges in regional partnerships with other key actors in the workforce development system – employers, job training organizations, other educational institutions, state and local economic development and workforce agencies, unions, community-based organizations, social service agencies – to devise specific strategies for strengthening pathways to educational and economic opportunity for all Illinoisans seeking a brighter future.

Mapping Career Paths: An Illustration

Attached are sample maps taken from *Career Pathway Primer and Planning Guide* (August 2003), by Davis Jenkins, Senior Fellow, University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute. The maps show actual efforts to build career pathways in specific occupational sectors and geographic regions.

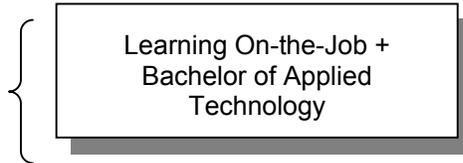
For More Information

For more information on the Illinois Career Pathways Initiative, contact Toni Henle, Director of Workforce Development Policy, Women Employed, at (312) 782-3902 or thenle@womenemployed.org. To access a complete prospectus, *Illinois Career Pathways Initiative: Strengthening Connections to Higher Education and Careers*, please visit the publications section of our website at www.womenemployed.org

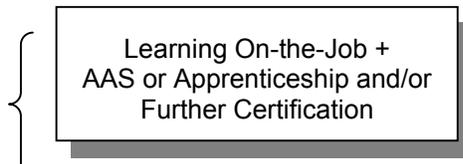
To read more about career pathways by practitioners in other states, see: Julian Alssid et al., *Building a Career Pathways System: Promising Practices in Community College-Centered Workforce Development* (Workforce Strategy Center, 2002, www.workforcestrategy.org), Nan Poppe et al., "Whose Job Is It? Creating Opportunities for Advancement" (Forthcoming in Giloth, R.P., Ed., *Workforce Intermediaries in the 21st Century*, Temple Univ. Press., www.clasp.org), and www.kwfnf.org.

Partner Providers

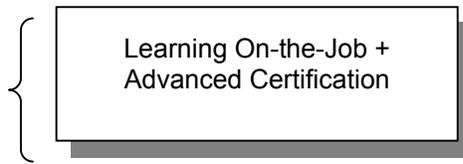
Illinois Institute of Technology
(Bachelor of Manufac. Tech.)



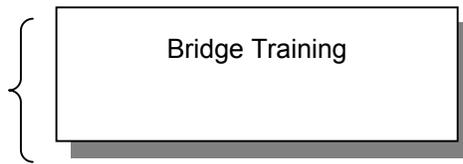
Tooling and Manufacturing Assoc.
Daley College (A.S.)



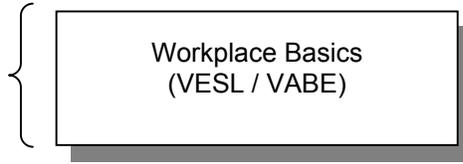
West Side Tech (Adv. Certificate)
Humboldt Park Vocational



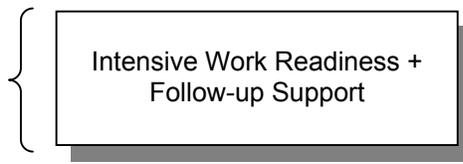
Instituto Progreso Latino – West Side Tech
(Manufacturing Bridge)
Jane Addams Resource Corp (Metal-working Skills Program)
Greater West Town (Wood Working)



Instituto Progreso Latino (VESL)
West Side Tech (Career Prep 1 & 2)



Employer & Employee Services
North Lawndale Employment Network
STRIVE Chicago



Technical Supervisor/Sales
(\$50K+ per year)

Skilled Technician/Journeyman
(\$30K+ per year)

Entry-Level Technician/Apprentice
(\$22K+ per year)

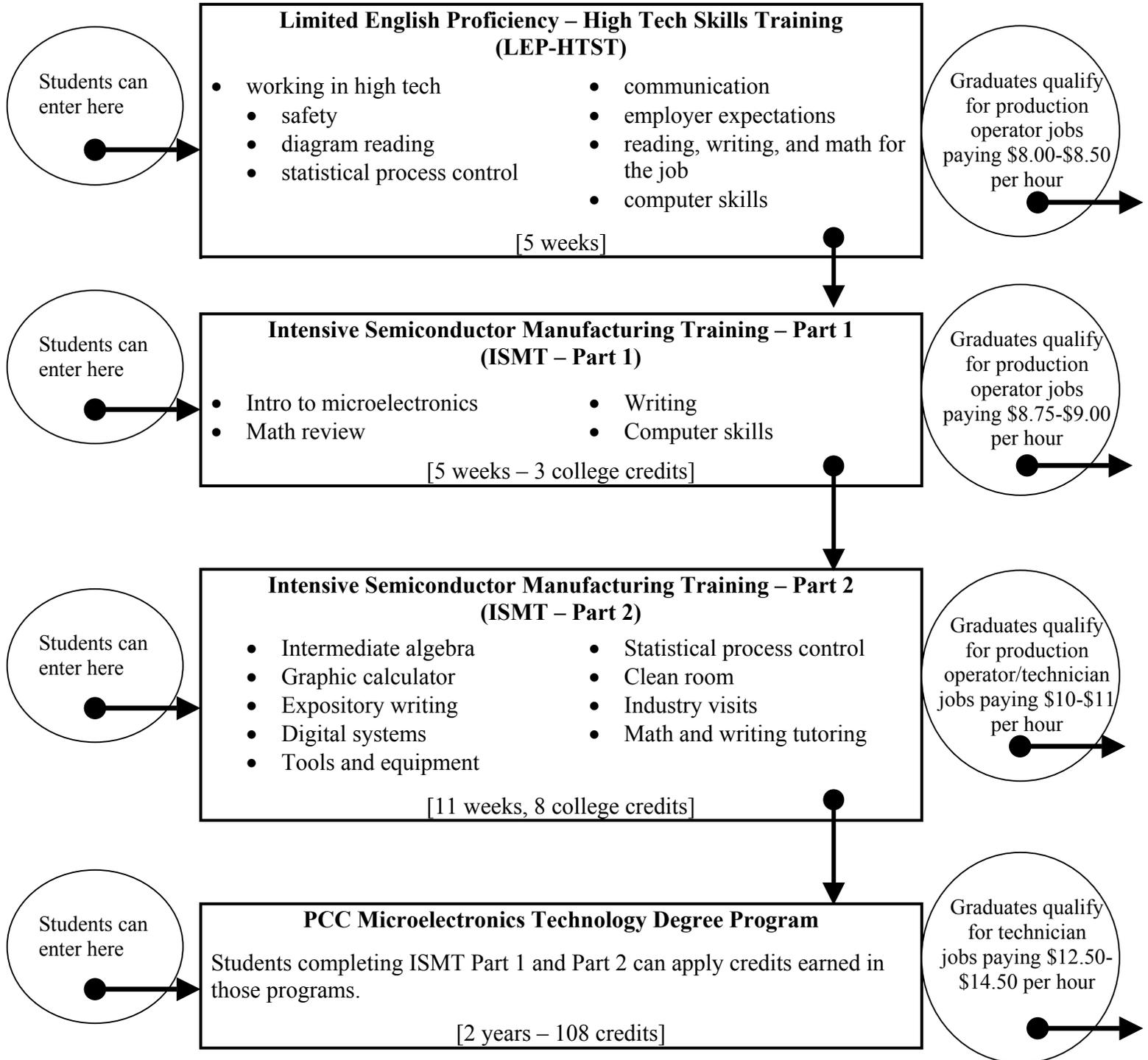
Entry-Level Skilled Jobs
(\$9+ per hour)

Semi-Skilled Jobs
(\$6 - \$9 per hour)

Laborer Jobs
(minimum wage)

Source/Contact: Davis Jenkins, University of Illinois at Chicago, www.uic.edu/cuppa/gci/.

**Portland Community College
Career Pathway to High Tech Training and Jobs in Semiconductors**



Source/Contact: Nan Poppe, Portland Community College, www.pcc.edu.