



GREAT ADMISSIONS REDESIGN IMPLEMENTATION AND OUTCOMES PROFILE

One Click College Admit in Illinois

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INTRODUCTION

Lumina Foundation has supported the reshaping and simplifying of the admissions process to transform how potential students apply, enroll, and access institutions through [The Great Admissions Redesign](#). In partnership with the Foundation, Research for Action (RFA) conducted an evaluation of the three implementation grantees to foster learning and continuous improvement. To build our understanding about the work being done by each of the grantees, RFA conducted interviews with grantee leaders and institutional administrators and analyzed admissions and enrollment data to capture the strategies, outcomes, and lessons learned from the initiative. This implementation profile provides early learnings for the field based on our analyses.

ADMISSIONS REDESIGN: CONTEXT AND CONDITIONS

Understanding the larger context and conditions in which postsecondary education reform takes place, as well as the resources and stakeholders involved in the work, is critical to make sense of the reform's design, as well as the larger lessons learned.

STATE POSTSECONDARY CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION FOR REDESIGN

Illinois' public postsecondary institutions include 12 university campuses and 48 community college campuses. Three postsecondary organizations have led the development of the One Click College Admit program in Illinois as part of the Great Admissions Redesign:

- The **Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)** is a statewide coordinating board for public postsecondary education;
- The **Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)**, which serves as a coordinating board for public two-year institutions, each of which have their own governing boards; and
- The **Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)**, which administers student financial aid.¹

The state's goal is to transition from guaranteed admissions for a subset of students to direct admissions for all high school students and automatic transfer for community college students. Two existing policies facilitated One Click College Admit adoption and implementation:

- **Common App:** Prior to the Great Admissions Redesign, Common App was already being used by all public universities, and state funding was provided to reimburse related costs for postsecondary institutions to implement One Click College Admit through Common App.

- **Guaranteed Admissions:** This admissions redesign was adopted through the *Public University Uniform Admission Pilot Program* in 2020, providing guaranteed admissions to participating public universities in the state for students who completed the minimum college preparatory material for the institution, satisfied the ACT or SAT assessment requirements, and either 1) graduated in the top 10% of their high school class, or 2) if the graduating class was small, had a grade point average of at least a 3.5 on a 4.0 scale. As of 2022, the law was expanded to guarantee admissions to the state's community college transfer students who: earned a minimum of 36 graded, transferable hours from the general education curriculum; attained a 3.0 GPA on all transferable coursework; and satisfied the university's English language proficiency requirement.

CONDITIONS FOR REDESIGN

Respondents described the larger conditions for admissions redesign in Illinois in the following ways:

- **Overall, the One Click College Admit initiative was supported by Illinois stakeholders, including both state and system policymakers and postsecondary institutions.** In describing the level of buy-in among policymakers in state government and postsecondary agencies, one respondent explained that “IBHE and the Governor’s Office chose to support this.” ICCB and ISAC partnered with IBHE, and postsecondary institutions were similarly supportive, according to multiple interviewees:

I think we’re all pretty much with the same mindset that it will be helpful. I haven’t heard anybody saying... ‘this is useless. Why are we doing this? I don’t want to do this at all.’ [Any concerns] are about the way it’s implemented and the way it’s structured, and trying to adapt.

Most institutions support direct admissions. Most of the institutions are like, “send [students] to us. We want the students, we welcome them, we would love to have them. We don’t want to be losing them to nowhere.”

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- **Due to existing policies and practices in Illinois, institutional implementation was not perceived to be a heavy lift.** Illinois’ public universities were already implementing a guaranteed admissions policy and were required to receive applications through Common App prior to One Click College Admit, making the transition easier to implement. Respondents explained that:

We already have a guaranteed transfer GPA that we will accept, and we have a significant number of articulation agreements, so it’s not a big lift for us, other than figuring out now how to talk about it, how to make it work.

Most [institutions] went to the Common App when they asked us to do it... so if we were doing it from scratch... making that transition and then doing One Click College Admit, I think that would have been a heavy lift, but we already all were on the Common App to begin with, so huge advantage for us.

There was ease of implementation... the Common App process we’ve already partnered on just [meant that we are] changing some fields for the Direct Admissions edition. That was pretty smooth and pretty easy.

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- **Some University of Illinois campuses will not be participating in One Click College Admit.** The University of Illinois campuses at Urbana-Champaign and Chicago are not required under state statute to offer this admissions redesign; instead, they must develop an access and outreach campaign to invite students to apply to these institutions. Flagship and other more selective universities often do not participate in such programs due to large application pools and greater enrollment levels, among other reasons. One respondent explained that “the flagship campus for the University of Illinois... can be more selective... it just comes down to institutions who are seeing a good yield... not having to worry about it so much, versus others of us who are struggling more... to have more students go to college.”

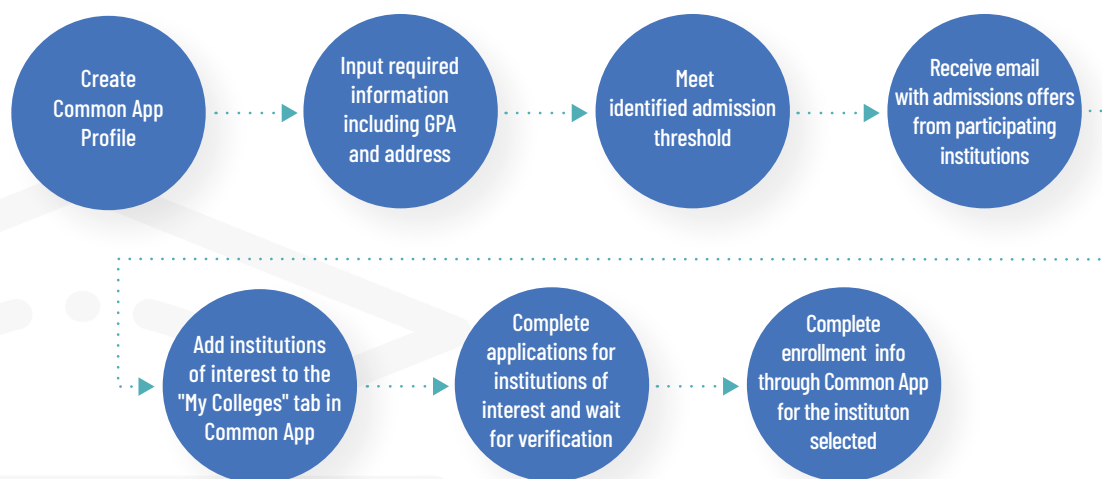
THE ADMISSIONS REDESIGN IN ILLINOIS: ONE CLICK COLLEGE ADMIT

Illinois is in the process of shifting from an initial partnership with Common App in which students manually entered their GPA to a more extensive version of their One Click College Admit program that will allow students to opt into sharing information with the state so that they can be more proactively notified about their college and university admissions. More specifically:

- One Click College Admit—Phase 1 (High School Classes of 2025 and 2026):** The IBHE launched a partnership with Common App starting in January 2025 to offer students the opportunity to find out which postsecondary institutions had admitted them based primarily on their GPA. Illinois high school seniors in the class of 2025 who 1) created a Common App profile, 2) input required information including their high school GPA and home address, and 3) met identified thresholds (which vary by institution) received an email with offers of admission and an invitation to complete the remaining steps through Common App.

Once students submit their application, institutions verify the accuracy of the information using high school transcripts and other documentation. Once an institution verifies that a student has met all requirements (including GPA and institution-specific expectations), they provide a formal offer of admission. Applications fees are waived, as well as essays and letters of recommendation. The [process](#) is outlined in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 | One Click College Admit Process (High School Classes of 2025 and 2026)

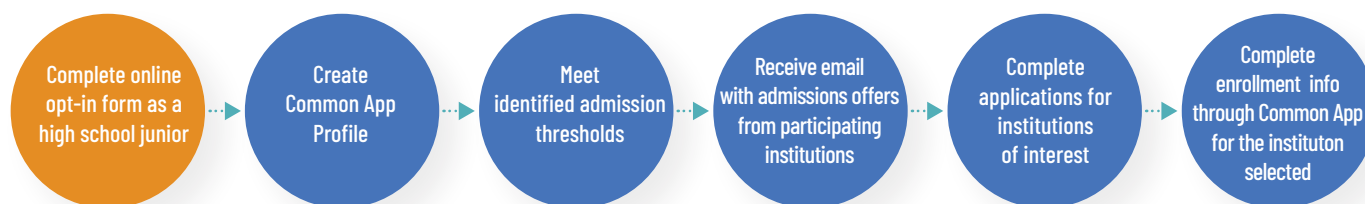


Participating Illinois universities involved in the initiative for the *class of 2025* included Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University (Carbondale and Edwardsville), and Western Illinois University. Some community colleges (i.e., Black Hawk College, Harper College, Lincoln Land College, Oakton College, Rend Lake College, Sandburg College, Sauk Valley Community College, and Triton College) agreed to be included in Common App’s portal in time for the *class of 2026*.

- **One Click College Admit—Phase 2:** In June 2025, the [Illinois General Assembly passed the Public University Direct Admission Program Act \(HB3522\)](#) allowing for the next phase in the development of One Click College Admit:

- **High School Class of 2027:** Starting with the class of 2027, *students who complete an online opt-in form as high school juniors* will have their contact information and GPA sent to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) by their high schools or community college. ISAC will then match the participating students to the appropriate institutions based on their verified GPA. As before, this program waives application fees, essays, and letters of recommendation. However, institutions will now be informed by ISAC as to which students are receiving an offer of direct admission and be able to reach out directly to a student without that student moving the institution to the “My Colleges” section of Common App. Starting with the class of 2027, *Illinois State University and the University of Illinois – Springfield, as well as all community colleges*, will also be participating. The process is outlined in Figure 2 below, with the new part of the process highlighted in orange.

FIGURE 2 | One Click College Admit Process (High School Class of 2027)



- **Community College Students:** Starting in **January 2026**, the program will also apply to community college students working on transferring to a participating Illinois university. As with the high school class of 2027, community college students will need to opt into the program to allow their community college to share their GPA and academic record (required 30 transferrable credit hours) with ISAC.

ISAC will then match their GPA with admission requirements at participating universities. Students opting in will receive admission offers during fall 2026 for enrollment in fall 2027.

IMPLEMENTATION AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

Due to the ongoing transition in the development of One Click College Admit outlined above and the timeline for the study's data collection (spring and fall 2025), this discussion will only include the implementation of the admissions redesign for the high school class of 2025.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

In January 2025, institutions began to implement the initial version of One Click College Admit for the high school class of 2025. In discussing this process, interview respondents described the policies and practices they put in place, as well as the issues they faced.

- **Implementation of the initial One Click College Admit program for the class of 2025 was not a significant challenge for participating universities.**

The state's history with guaranteed admissions, existing partnership with Common App, and focus on high school GPA instead of test scores helped facilitate the transition. One institutional respondent explained that "going from guaranteeing to [One Click College Admit]... was not a struggle for us." Respondents further explained that:

It is not that much more of a lift for the institutions to participate... at least for the public four-year institutions, because they've already built their information for Common App's portal... and because of COVID, most of our public universities eliminated the testing and went to just GPAs for their admissions, so this was not a big change for most of those institutions.

We have been testing optional... so GPA has been our focus, so it has really been reassessing, what are the questions we really need to be asking on the application? What are the questions we have asked, and we'd like but isn't really a need, and that our approach over the past few years has been to pull back and really just get the needed information anyway.

We had already been partnered with Common App so from an implementation standpoint [it was] pretty simple. We get a daily feed from Common App. They have an indicator that says Direct Admission on it, so we know who is coming to us through that path. From a technology implementation process, it was pretty simple.

- **Community colleges had not partnered with Common App prior to this initiative, so they have to develop new systems to facilitate data sharing.** Unlike universities that had already worked with Common App, community colleges have to create systems for this process. As one respondent explained, "For the community colleges, the admissions staff will need to build that initial [Common App] portal to provide the data they need... that's where the lift comes in."
- **Participating universities determined their GPA threshold for admission and any additional questions they wanted to include in the Common App portal.** State policymakers allowed universities to individually set their admission requirement in this area, unlike the guaranteed admissions program in which the threshold was set by the state across institutions. In addition, institutional administrators reviewed Common App questions that students are required to answer, and then requested any additional questions they thought were critical to include based on their existing institutional application.

- **Once a student has been admitted to an institution through One Click College Admit, the university is responsible for communicating with the student to encourage application completion and enrollment.** As one respondent explained, “admissions folks have to do their work to reach out... to get the student enrolled.” This includes tracking student data files, downloading the names of students who express interest in the university, and then conducting outreach activities with those students about the assets of the institution and possible financial aid, along with other information.
- **Universities proactively planned for the loss of revenue from waiving application fees.** While the state provided institutions with funds to help offset the deficit, administrators understood this support to be temporary. To address issues of financial sustainability, administrators explained that:

We have had to change our planning for what we do with application fee dollars that have supported a chunk of the operation. Now the state has refunded that from a grant a little bit the past couple of years, but we're anticipating that probably not continuing. For some institutions, [application fees] are a substantial revenue source used to fund their admissions offices, so that is something that has emerged... that may mean some kind of appropriation to offset that cost... that the institutions will have to absorb.

- **The state provided institutions with funding to cover the cost of adopting Common App's Direct Admissions program.** Common App's Direct Admissions is described as a program that is “proactively admitting students into college before they apply... to simplify and streamline the admissions process.” To help incentivize adoption at the institutional level, the state covered the cost of the program delivered via the Common App.

STUDENT ADMISSIONS DATA

As with any admissions redesign, access to student data is a critical component. Student data privacy concerns stymied legislative progress for months, and the state eventually compromised to move the reforms forward by agreeing to have students opt-into sharing their data with ISAC to facilitate proactive notification. More specifically:

- **Illinois has the necessary student data in place, but data privacy concerns would not allow access without student consent.** Concerns in the K12 sector about accessing student outcomes data led to delays in passing necessary legislation to allow for access to facilitate One Click College Admit as originally conceived. As one respondent explained:

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission runs financial aid [and are] the ones really with all the data on this... but it's ultimately the authority to be able to prepopulate [Common App]... it's sorting through the privacy issues, the permissions, the legislative authority, and K12 buy-in for it, so there's a lot of political hurdles involved as well. You can have the data, but if different data systems are not willing to share it and integrate it into some kind of a common portal, then... you can't use it.

As explained above, to address this barrier, Illinois decided to require students to opt-in to One Click College Admit in their junior year of high school.

- **Requiring student and parent opt-in became the workaround to address the policy impasse.** Starting with the class of 2027, students who complete an online opt-in form as high school juniors will have their contact information and GPA sent to ISAC by their high schools or community college. ISAC will then match participating students to appropriate institutions based on their admissions criteria. Similarly, community college students will need to opt into the program to allow their community college to share their GPA and academic record with the required 30 transferable credit hours with ISAC. ISAC will then match their GPA with admission requirements at participating universities.

COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT THE ADMISSIONS REDESIGN

Admissions redesigns need to be clearly explained to many different stakeholder groups, including those in state and system governance, postsecondary institutions, the K12 sector, and students and their families. This can include marketing campaigns, advocacy efforts, and technological platforms, along with other strategies. Illinois' respondents offered multiple issues to consider based on their experience with One Click College Admit implementation.

- Respondents emphasized the need to engage with not just students, but also families, counselors, and other school district practitioners in offering admission through One Click College Admit.** While students ultimately decide their postsecondary trajectory, multiple other groups, including their family members, guidance counselors, and other school practitioners need to be aware of the process and help students navigate their college options. This requires states, systems, and postsecondary institutions to communicate with all of these groups. As respondents explained:

We know we also need to engage with counselors and parents, school districts and others around the engagement... once we know a little bit more about how this will work... we'll engage with the counselors and others to support students.

Engaging with high schools and high school counselors and with parents so that they know what's coming has to be part of any implementation... which is why it's important that the school management groups are on board with this because they're going to be the ones that are going to help push the message as well... so I think they're important parts of the implementation in addition to whatever we can communicate directly to school district personnel.

Illinois state and system leaders have also worked on a marketing campaign to encourage students, families, and high school practitioners to take advantage of One Click College Admit. As one respondent stated, "We already have a marketing plan for who our target audiences are: the high school students, the high school counselors, the school district leadership."

- Despite One Click College Admit, postsecondary institutions are still communicating with students between the application and enrollment process.**

One of the shifts in implementing this new admissions redesign has been the changing process of communicating with potential students. The Common App lets students know that they have been admitted, but the individual community colleges and universities also have to communicate with students to encourage enrollment in their institution.

As respondents explained:

As soon as we get the information that the student has any interest... we're putting them in our communication flows... between the student hitting submit [on their application and making an enrollment decision]... we have a counselor that is going to start to outreach to them... immediately.

The key piece... is that... if it's through the Common App and we have their transcript... it's just about communicating to these students exactly what makes [this university] unique.

- **The adoption of multiple admissions redesigns can create confusion that both states/systems and institutions need to address.** Illinois has had a guaranteed admissions policy in place since 2020, and the more recent implementation of One Click College Admit is being rolled out in multiple phases which shifting processes, which can create confusion. As one respondent explained, their institution has had to “revisit conversations [with school districts] because of the confusion.” To address this potential issue, states, systems, and institutions need to overcommunicate across stakeholder groups about the distinctions in the redesigns and how to navigate the admission redesigns successfully so that they meet their goal of simplifying the admissions process.
- **Provides considerable aid to families with financial need:** Along with Pell grants, ISAC administers the [Monetary Award Program \(MAP\)](#). Multiple respondents explained that students who receive both MAP and Pell funds, as well as institutional scholarships, can often attend the regional universities participating in One Click College Admit “for free in Illinois.” The administration reportedly invested \$120 million over the last few years in the MAP program after it had been “neglected for many years under previous administrations.” Further, it is a high school graduation requirement in Illinois that students complete the FAFSA. Additionally, “community colleges are largely subsidized, if not entirely free” in Illinois.

FINANCIAL AID

In responding to questions regarding how One Click College Admit is addressing the cost of college, one respondent explained that “everyone knows [financial aid] is a barrier” and that more needs to be done to make college more affordable. To that end, Illinois:

- **Waives the application fee for students participating in One Click College Admit:** This program waives application fees for all participating students, as well as essays, and letters of recommendation. Students who are not participating or applying to institutions not included in the program, however, may need to pay an application fee.
- **Offers free financial aid support:** While college admissions notification through the program does not include information on financial aid specific to each student, [ISAC offers free financial aid support](#) for students and families to help them identify financial aid opportunities and apply for aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

EARLY REDESIGN OUTCOMES

The goals of the admissions redesign include meeting implementation milestones in the short term and improving student outcomes, specifically:



An increase in **student knowledge of admissions opportunities through One Click College Admit**;



An examination of the feasibility of expanding use of the **Common App for transfer student applications from the community colleges to the state universities**;



Use of **Common App Direct Admission** process to generate a list of institutions where students are eligible for admission based on GPA criteria alone;



The **passage of legislation** to facilitate data matching for direct admissions; and



Increases in **enrollment and transfer rates** in Illinois public universities and community colleges, especially among students of color.

Overall, the work in Illinois should **simplify the college application and admissions processes** and help more students see themselves as college ready; result in an **increase in overall postsecondary persistence and completion rates**, and **close equity gaps** among underrepresented and minoritized populations.

While the admissions redesign has only impacted one cohort of students so far, this section leverages data shared by IBHE to assess early changes in outcomes. The analyses below share trends in applications and enrollments at participating institutions¹ from fall 2022 through fall 2025. Together, these figures illustrate the early impact of One Click College Admit, which launched in January 2025 – midway through the admissions cycle for students enrolling in fall 2025.



¹ Public institutions participating in One Click College Admit: Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governor's State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University–Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, and Western Illinois University.

APPLICATIONS

First, we assessed how the number of applications to participating institutions has changed since the implementation of One Click College Admit. Because this admissions redesign is focused on students from Illinois but Common App includes applicants from other states as well, Figure 3 displays the number of total applications as well as the number of applications specifically from students from Illinois over the period examined. Figure 4 displays the year-over-year percent change in the same metrics.

FIGURE 3 | Number of applications, overall and those from IL applicants, for cohorts starting Fall 2022 – 2025

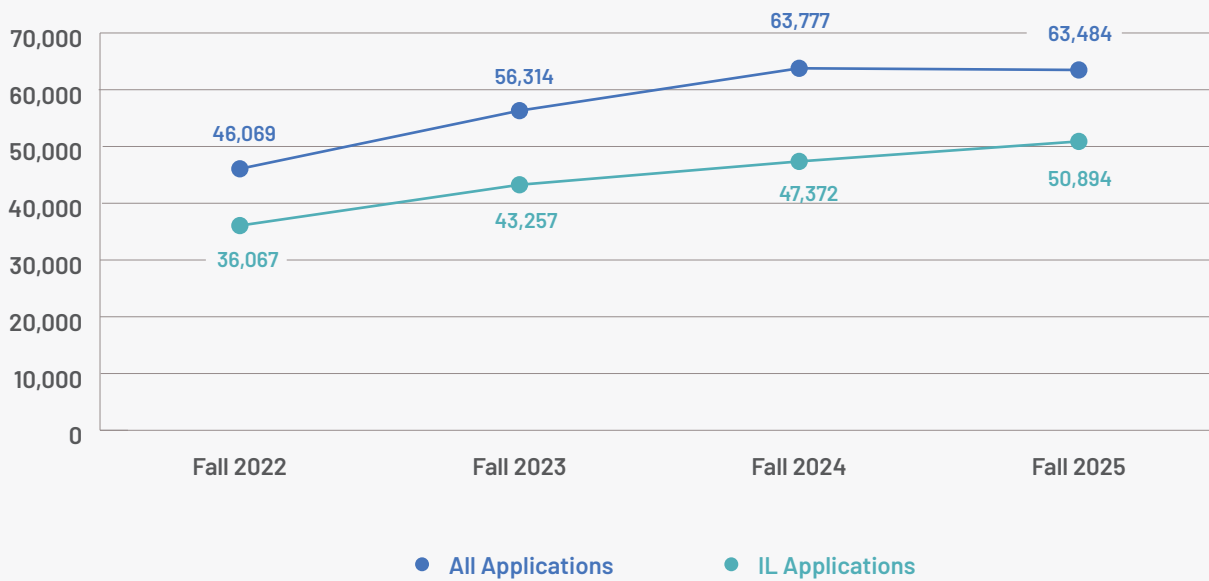
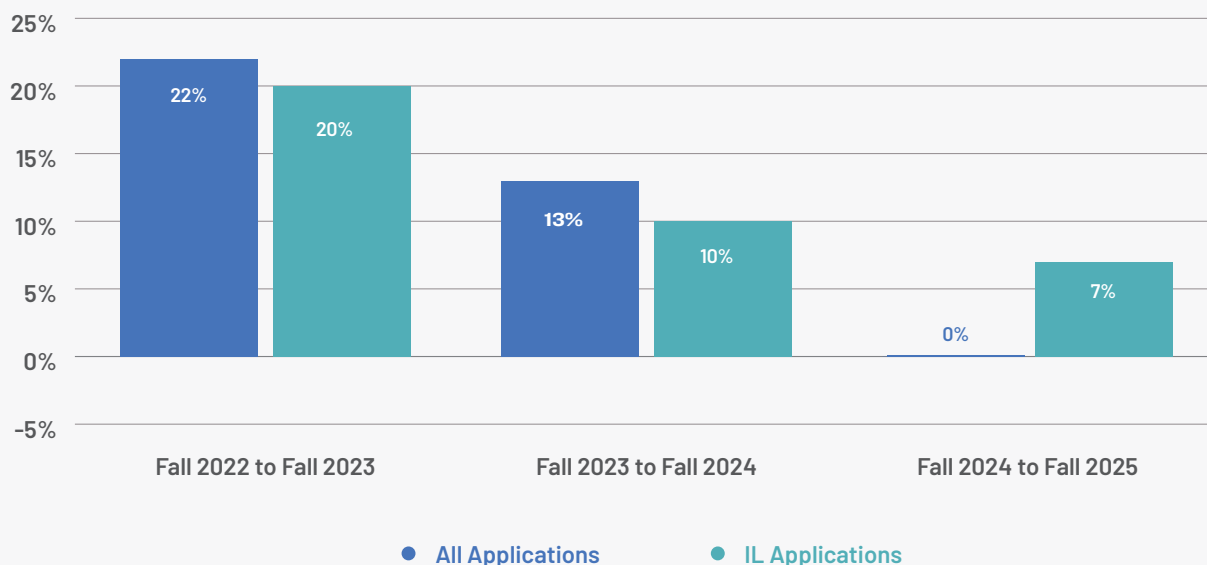


FIGURE 4 | Percentage change in applications, overall and for IL applicants only, 2022 - 2025



Key findings from Figures 3 and 4 include the following:

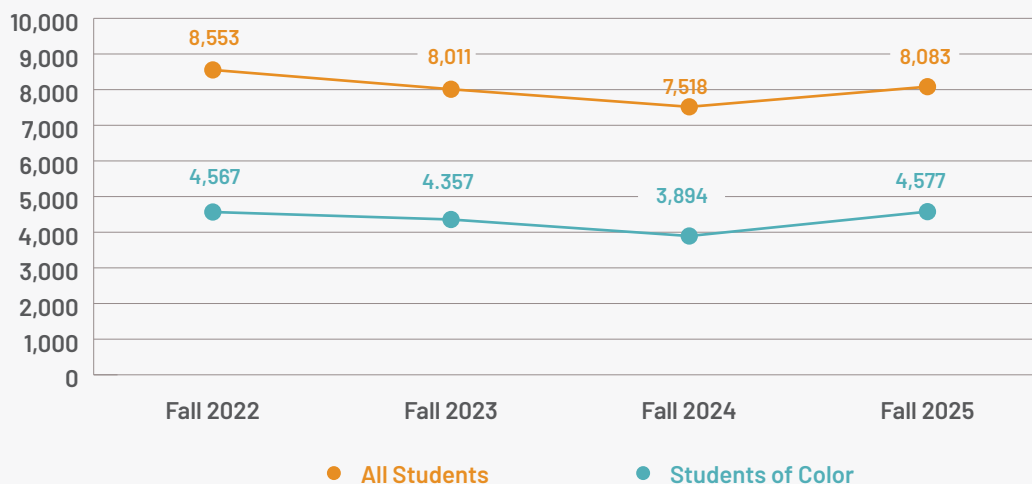
- Prior to the launch of One Click College Admit, applications to participating institutions were growing at a strong pace.** Total applications increased by 22% between fall 2022 and fall 2023, and by an additional 13% between fall 2023 and fall 2024, rising from 46,069 to 63,777 over that two-year period. Applications from Illinois students followed a similar trajectory, growing 20% and 10% in those same intervals.
- In fall 2025 – the first cohort affected by One Click College Admit – applications from Illinois students continued to grow, while total applications held essentially flat.** That year, participating institutions received 63,484 applications total, a less than 1% change from the prior year. However, applications from Illinois students grew by 7%, from 47,372 to 50,894, suggesting that the program is beginning to have a positive effect on in-state student interest even in its first partial year of implementation.

It is important to note that because One Click College Admit did not launch until January 2025, many students had already submitted their applications before the program was available, limiting its reach for this cohort. As the program becomes fully operational in subsequent years, stronger effects on total application volume may follow.

ENROLLMENTS

Enrollment data restricted to only students from Illinois was not available, but it was available differentiated by race/ethnicity, a key metric in understanding the equity impact of the admissions redesign. Figure 5 displays total number of enrolled first-time freshmen at the eight institutions participating in One Click College Admit, alongside enrollments at those institutions among first-time freshmen students of color² from fall 2022 through fall 2025.

FIGURE 5 | Number of enrolled first-time freshmen, overall and among students of color, Fall 2022 - 2025



Key findings from Figure 5 include the following:

- **Prior to the implementation of One Click College Admit, enrollment was declining.** At participating institutions, total first-time freshmen enrollment declined from 8,553 in fall 2022 to 7,518 in fall 2024.
- **In fall 2025, however, total enrollment reversed course,** rising to 8,083 – an increase of 565 students, or 8%, over the prior year. While it is not possible to attribute this recovery solely to One Click College Admit given its mid-cycle launch, the timing is an encouraging early signal.
- **Enrollment among students of color increased substantially in the first year of One Click College Admit.** There were 4,567 enrolled first-year students of color in fall 2022, representing 53% of total first-year enrollment, a share that fluctuated modestly through fall 2024 before rising to 57% in fall 2025. In absolute terms, enrollment of first-year students of color grew from 3,894 in fall 2024 to 4,577 in fall 2025 – an increase of 683 students, and the highest count in the period examined. This growth drove the overall enrollment recovery and suggests that One Click College Admit may be making early progress toward its equity goals, even within the constraints of its first partial year of implementation.

² Students of color includes students identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander or Two or More Races. Excluded are students identified as White or an International Student (since race/ethnicity is unknown in the latter case).

SUCSESSES, CHALLENGES, AND EQUITY

Respondents identified a number of successes and challenges that may help to inform the work being done in other states, and are discussed in this section, as well as the ways in which One Click College Admit has helped to address issues of equity for students.

ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION SUCSESSES

Successes through One Click College Admit, even in the early stages prior to the passage of the supporting legislation, included the following:

- **There has been broad support at the state level for the reform.** Despite privacy concerns around K12 data access, stakeholders working through the adoption of the admissions redesign “have so much support.” Even the K12 sector has “also been supportive of the idea, and that’s a big win... just need to work through the opt in.”
- **Students using Common App can find out early where they have been admitted.** While the initial iteration of One Click College Admit (for the classes of 2025 and 2026) has not included all of the components intended in the initiative, “students who have a [Common App] account can tell [which institutions] they match with, and that’s a big step forward.” Additional changes will be in place for the class of 2027 and beyond, further facilitating early notification of admission.
- **The college application process is simplified for students.** While students in the class of 2025 and 2026 need to complete a Common App profile and an application process, essays and letters of recommendation are waived, making it easier for students.
- **The collaboration across state offices, postsecondary agencies, and institutions has been successful.** The IBHE, ICCB, ISAC, Governor’s Office, and state legislature have worked together to successfully adopt One Click College Admit, and implementation has been supported by collaboration across institutions.

ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Any new policy comes with challenges; interview respondents identified the following in the adoption and implementation of One Click College Admit:

- **Common App’s Direct Admissions program includes institutions from outside Illinois.** While the One Click College Admit program helps identify regional universities in Illinois through Common App where students have been admitted, it also lists colleges and universities from across the country through the nationwide Common App Direct Admissions program. Illinois already has a large percentage of students who leave the state to attend college, and so this aspect of the initial phase of the initiative was seen as an issue. Further, while institutions in Illinois are “only able provide One Click College Admit offers to students [in the state], somebody in Kentucky [for example]... could pick students all over the country to offer admission.”
- **The strict procurement process in Illinois slowed state adoption.** Illinois is known for hurdles in the state procurement process, and that was the case with One Click College Admit. One respondent explained that the state has “some of the strictest procurement rules because we had a reputation for inappropriate procurement decisions in the past, leaving us with a process that is really stringent.” IBHE worked through the procurement process to get approval to enter into agreement with the Common App instead of setting up separate programs with each individual participating institution. Securing approval was the “last hoop to jump through” in order for the state to move ahead with the initial One Click College Admit project in January 2025.

- Developing the procedure for community college student transfer through One Click College Admit remains a work in progress due to underlying transfer issues.** In exploring their options for the transfer application process, it became clear that Common App does not function as smoothly for community college transfer students as it does for graduating high school students, and that state and system postsecondary leaders would need to consider alternatives. The challenge, in part, has to do with the additional requirements for transfer and the criteria for admission to not just a university, but a particular program of study. As one respondent explained:

Where we have to spend time is on transfer... do we have to fix the whole transfer problem to admit students in a simplified way... have all the transcripts assessed, all the courses approved, all the credits accepted, enroll all the students in their program of study in order to effectively admit them? We still have to verify... the data match, identify the students appropriately, match to the university criteria, and create the data file, but if institutions really need to admit students to the program study, then that's another bridge.

- Loss of the revenue from application fees was identified as an issue for some institutions.** While not a concern for many participating universities, “a couple of schools who do charge an application fee [said they would] bite the bullet and make it free.” However, with limited state funding for postsecondary institutions and decreasing enrollment levels, any revenue loss can create a challenge for smaller, regional universities and community colleges.

- Privacy concerns around student data stalled legislative progress.** As is often the case with admissions redesigns, concerns around the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law protecting student education records, became a hurdle for the state legislature as opponents argued that sharing data across state agencies to facilitate proactive notification of student admission to regional universities was not allowed. One respondent explained that:

Our intent was to pass legislation authorizing us to establish the direct admissions program for high school students and for community college transfer students... it got hung up on FERPA issues... we need to find a way to navigate that... there was really no substantive disagreement on how the program would work, it was simply a matter of do parents have to opt in or can we create authority for them to just opt out?

In order to pass [the Public University Direct Admission Program Act \(HB3522\)](#), the state agreed to have students opt into sharing data between their high school and ISAC to participate in the program.



- **Institutional capacity can be an issue with increased application processing.** While the admissions redesign simplified the admissions process for students, universities will still need to process applications and transcript data, which is expected to increase as a result of this reform. As one respondent at a regional university explained,

Our [application] processing team is very small... we've got two full time staff and a student worker... and so bumping up application volume of students who may not be that interested [in enrolling] and the processing time to review the transcripts, to do all of those things when we get more applications... has been brought up as a frustration.

Further, there was concern expressed that potential students may simply select regional universities for possible admission in Illinois “because they can” and that these institutions may be “investing resources and processing... ‘soft’ or ‘ghost’ applications from students with limited interest in the institution.

- **One Click College Admit was not launched until January 2025.** Illinois was not able to launch the initial phase of their new admissions redesign until halfway through the 2024–25 academic year, after many students had already submitted their applications. As one respondent explained, “we’re about four months behind... we assume we’ll have fewer applications and fewer coming in from Common App’s Direct Admission program.”

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS

The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) adopted a strategic plan in 2021, A Thriving Illinois, with three goals that focus on addressing equity gaps, sustainability, and growth, including fostering redesign to drive Illinois’ economy. **Improving equity has continued to be a motivation in the adoption of One Click College Admit.** In exploring whether and how concerns around equity has played a part in the work, multiple respondents spoke openly about the need to address the issue, especially for racially minoritized students:

We absolutely believe that the gaps that we are seeing in enrollment, persistence... all of that is a result of structural racism that’s been built into the system..., there’s just no hiding in our data that there is a systematic problem with how we recruit, retain, and support students of color in our higher education system.

I think the beauty of... direct admissions based on whatever that minimum GPA is really going to help us widen the net for those minority students who may have thought they weren’t college material to really help get them enrolled into college.

Illinois has been pretty forthcoming and clear with an equity agenda. Institutions have to submit an equity plan to the state of Illinois... so we have goals mandated by the state that address equity outcomes... Illinois is very receptive to creating spaces where Black and brown students will be successful.

LESSONS LEARNED

In this final section of the profile, we will discuss the arguments that were effective in the state for admissions redesign, the collaboration and communication taking place, the unintended consequences of the reform, and overall lessons learned.

ARGUMENTS FOR ADMISSIONS REDESIGN

While admissions redesigns have developed in states and systems across the country, it can still be a challenge in some circumstances and with some constituencies to make the case for this type of reform, especially in light of common concerns around student data privacy. Respondents explained that arguments that worked in Illinois to gain support for One Click College Admit included that it:

- **Simplifies the admissions process for students:** When discussing One Click College Admit with state legislators, they liked the idea of making the college admissions process simpler to facilitate more students attending colleges and universities.
- **Increases college applications:** To increase enrollment, institutions need more students to apply, and so “they welcome the additional applicants and knowing that anyone with a 3.0 GPA is going to be told, ‘you can come to A, B and C university; they like that idea.’ For community colleges, even as open access institutions, the idea that their campuses will be listed as options for students on the Common App is also appealing:

The case making here I think was pretty simple really... we want to make sure community colleges are on this option list. You want students to see your name alongside your university partners so that students see you as an option.

- **Decreases student migration to other states for college:** Illinois legislators were also “very interested in keeping state students in Illinois... they do not like that we lose so many people out of state because they don’t come back” after college.
- **Helps to address student equity gaps:** While this term has become an issue in some states, improving equitable opportunities and outcomes “continues to be a real concern for many of the members of the General Assembly [in Illinois]; to the extent this can help, that’s another argument for it.”



COLLABORATION

State or system admissions redesigns cannot be developed in a bubble. It is critical that policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholder groups work together and learn from each other in designing, adopting and implementing the redesign. Illinois provides multiple examples of such collaboration.

- **Illinois’ existing mechanisms for collaboration across postsecondary institutions helped to facilitate implementation and problem solving.** One respondent explained that “higher education is a small family with lots of collaboration.” Existing monthly group meetings for different types of institutional postsecondary administrators from across the state (e.g., financial aid, admissions, enrollment) facilitated collaboration and problem solving, both during and individually outside of these meetings. For example, institutional respondents explained that:

Illinois has a good number of groups in which the public universities participate... there is a financial aid group, there is a registration and admissions group... there is a chief enrollment officers' group that... typically meet every month.... I'll be on the phone with other institutions, and we'll talk about everything very collaboratively, not necessarily looking to be in competition with each other.... there's so much commonality that we need to share.

In Illinois, the individuals who serve as vice presidents for enrollment management all meet monthly and Common App has been the topic over the past year for sure, as to how people are rolling with it. I've gotten to hear how others are figuring it out.

- **State and system postsecondary agencies, the Governor’s Office, and the state legislature collaborated to build support for, design, and adopt One Click College Admit.** The IBHE, ICCB, and ISAC, as well as the Governor’s Office, worked together on the development of this redesign and the supporting legislation that made it possible. Respondents explained that:

The Governor’s Office convened institutions and... that continuing support and collaboration... is super important. We also have a lot of support in the General Assembly because of the work that we’ve been doing... when we shared this idea with the head of the higher education legislative caucus... they were very excited about it... I think we’re in a really amazing political environment in Illinois... where we have support to do this work [from the] Governor’s Office, legislature, and state agency partnerships.

IBHE has done a really good job of building bridges with [the] head of community college. You have a governor who has set that stage... and so when they meet with legislators, they’re savvy enough to build the relationships to get a lot of this legislation through the hurdles.

- **Collaboration with the K12 sector is also critical for successful adoption and implementation of admissions redesigns.** State postsecondary agencies did not collaborate with the K12 sector early in the process; as one respondent explained, “We didn’t engage with the school districts... early enough and so they... were not paying attention.” This contributed to opposition to some of the initial legislative proposals. Over time, however, the IBHE “built relationships with the Illinois State Board of Education.” Further, Illinois has also developed a Superintendents’ Advisory Committee with members representing a variety of school districts across the state that has provided input on how to implement One Click College Admit.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Policies will often lead to outcomes no one expected or intended as part of a new initiative or program. Respondents identified the following actual or potential consequences from One Click College Admit:

- **Concerns were raised about whether universities would be able to ensure housing for increasing numbers of incoming students.** As regional universities process more applications from students through One Click College Admit, institutions have expressed concern over a “newer issue... access to housing for students... for institutions that are getting tight on housing and cannot admit more students because they actually don’t have a residence for them to live in.” If a substantially larger number of students accept their admission and enroll, housing may not be available.

- **Potential decreases in student yield rates will need to be understood in context.** If institutions are processing more applications, potentially from a larger portion of students with lower levels of interest in enrolling in their university, yield rates may drop and cause concern on campuses. Indeed, one regional university reported that when they participated in an earlier direct admissions pilot:

Yield numbers tanked the next year because we got so many more applications, so it’s stepping back and making sure people understand that your student interest changes and you’re going to get more applications, which doesn’t necessarily mean your yield is good. Likely your yield is not going to stay the same, because students are finding out about you very differently than when they were being proactive [in their college search process].

OVERALL LESSONS LEARNED

In summarizing lessons learned, a number of themes emerge from the Illinois context:

- **Marshall support across stakeholder groups, including the K12 sector:** Illinois' reforms were developed in collaboration with multiple groups, including IBHE, ICCB, ISAC, the Governor's Office, institutions and the K12 sector;
- **Leverage existing policies that facilitate reform:** Illinois used their existing policies around the Common App and guaranteed admissions to launch the One Click College Admit;
- **Create opportunities for institutional collaboration and problem solving:** Illinois utilized existing mechanisms for collaboration across postsecondary institutions to facilitate implementation and problem solving;
- **If planned admissions redesigns are delayed, pivot to create alternatives to move reform ahead:** Legislative and procurement issues led to delays in planned policy adoption, but Illinois worked with Common App's Direct Admissions program as a way to create an initial redesign before One Click College Admit could be adopted as intended;
- **Consider opt-in if privacy concerns are stalling reform:** In order to move ahead with One Click College Admit, despite the availability of data, Illinois decided to have students opt-into the program as juniors in high school;
- **Admissions redesigns need to be clearly explained to many different stakeholder groups:** These include those in state and system governance, postsecondary institutions, the K12 sector, and students and their families, through marketing campaigns, advocacy efforts, and technological platforms, along with other strategies; and
- **Determine how to manage potential revenue losses with application fee waivers:** Institutions reported planning for how to offset the loss of revenue without application fees to ensure that admissions, enrollment management, and other related departments continued to operate as needed.

For additional information on this admissions redesign, see Research for Action's Illinois One Click College Admit logic model at researchforaction.org/admissions-redesign/5

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ<https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-postsecondary-governance-structures/>

ⁱⁱ<https://www.commonapp.org/directadmissions>