

IMPROVE COLLEGE ACCESS THROUGH EQUITABLE COURSEWORK

A COMPONENT OF THE JANUARY 2021 BLACK CAUCUS EDUCATION PACKAGE



Illinois students compete in the same global economy for jobs after graduation. They compete for admission into the same prestigious universities. But they come from districts that offer vastly different opportunities to take advanced coursework and earn early college credits. **No Illinois high school students should be excluded from admission to an Illinois public university simply because they were denied access to the recommended coursework.**

There is a big difference between high school graduation requirements and expectations to attend Illinois' flagship public university. The University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (UIUC) currently holds the most rigorous coursework expectations among Illinois public universities for incoming freshmen. Here is an example of that discrepancy:

SUBJECT	CURRENT UIUC EXPECTATION	CORRESPONDING IL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT	MATCHING REQUIREMENT?
English	4 years required	4 years required	YES
Math	3 or 3.5 years required, 4 years recommended	3 years required	YES
Social sciences	2 years required, 4 years recommended	2 years required	YES
Lab sciences	2 years required, 4 years recommended	2 years of science, no requirement they be "lab" science	NO
Language other than English	2 years required, 4 years recommended	None	NO
Flexible academic units	2 years required, 4+ years recommended	Not explicitly required	NO

The Equitable Coursework for College Access Act opens doors to college access for all Illinois students by aligning graduation requirements to college enrollment requirements:

- To ensure that no high school graduate is excluded from college admission because of lack of course access, **high schools must provide students the opportunity to enroll in any course required or recommended for college admission.** If a school is unable to offer the course in-house, it must find an alternative way to provide it and cover any cost to the student, such as by partnering with a neighboring district, community college, or another course provider.
- Next, the bill requires the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) to jointly produce a review by February 1 of each year of high school graduation requirements and coursework recommended or required for admission to Illinois' public universities.

Schools would **share this review with students and parents before finalizing course schedules in grades 8 – 12 to ensure that students understand college admission expectations.**

- Finally, the bill modifies high school graduation requirements: it stipulates that **one of the required science courses but be a laboratory science** and, for students entering high school in or after the 2026-2027 school year, it **adds two years of foreign language to the graduation requirements.** This five-year planning period before implementation of the foreign language requirement recognizes the current teacher shortage crisis and allows time for newly proposed teacher education scholarships to increase the pipeline of foreign language teachers.

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