

ILLINOIS Pathways



The Illinois Finance Learning Exchange Prospectus



I. Notification of Purpose:

The purpose of this prospectus is to introduce preliminary information to prospective sponsors, partners, and volunteers as well as to inform target audiences about available educational initiatives with respect to the Finance Learning Exchange.

II. The STEM Finance Learning Exchange At-A-Glance

III. Executive Summary

IV. Overview

V. About Econ Illinois

VI. Key Initiatives & Projects

VII. Opportunities for Engagement in Illinois

II. The STEM Finance Learning Exchange At-A-Glance

The employment landscape is constantly shifting. Education needs to be more relevant to the real world, with resources and investments coordinated in a way that better prepares students for workforce opportunities.

In order to achieve this, we need complimentary community and state-level approaches for this work. Illinois Pathways was launched in 2012 to respond to the changing education-to-employment dynamics.

Illinois Pathways are innovative public-private education partnerships organized to support Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) Programs of Study from preschool through graduate school (P-20) while coordinating and reducing the transaction costs among statewide networks of education partners, businesses, industry associations, labor organizations, and other organizations. P-20 STEM Programs of Study serve as a model for bridging programs across education institutions, improving academic achievement, increase graduation rates, and improve transitions to postsecondary education and employment. P-20 STEM Programs of Study are also designed to improve access and success for underrepresented populations in STEM fields, such as women, minorities, low-income, and disabled students.

Illinois Pathways empower students to explore their academic and career interests through local programs of study designed to prepare them for careers in the fastest growing business sectors. These programs feature a series of orientations and advanced courses across educational institutions that are paired with hands on learning experiences, assessments, and industry credentialing opportunities.

Learning Exchanges have been formed for selected high demand career clusters/industries to improve the coordination and delivery of resources, work based learning opportunities, career guidance and partnerships that support local STEM programs. Each sector-based Learning Exchange is governed by a consortia of education, business, and community partners and orchestrated by a specific lead entity that serves as fiscal agent prepared to receive public and private funding. Learning Exchanges are required to have a state-approved strategic plan and have a state designation, but they operate as independent, voluntary public-private networks using the Illinois Pathways Initiative Governance Model.

The Finance Learning Exchange (FLE) is one of nine Illinois Learning Exchanges and provides curricular and other resources to support the selection of careers in finance and the preparation of high school students as they transition to post-secondary institutions and careers. The finance career cluster encompasses accounting, banking & financial services, economics, finance, insurance & risk management, property & real estate management, and securities & investments. The finance sector in Illinois is comprised of a set of institutions, instruments, and the regulatory framework that permits transactions to be made by extending credit and incurring and settling debts. Broadly understood, the financial sector encompasses banks, insurance companies, real estate agencies, and organizations that manage securities, commodities and other investments.

[Econ Illinois](#) leads the Finance Learning Exchange and is building a sustainable model of educational engagement for our youth. As a 501(c) 3 charitable non-profit that has served the Illinois educational community for over 65 years, Econ Illinois provides economic and financial literacy programs and services starting at the elementary level and extending throughout adulthood, enabling individuals to participate effectively in the economy.

III. Executive Summary

Throughout the last decade, the educational landscape has shifted more than what is expected due to cyclical trends. Variables that previously had not directly impacted curriculum delivery and practice, assessment methods, or local and state learning standards are now driving curriculum content to be more encompassing and more rigorous. Students must show application of learned content in innovative ways while educators must tie all covered content to the Common Core State Standards and local district-wide learning benchmarks.

Econ Illinois is uniquely situated to address and support classroom curriculum needs while introducing educators and students to engaging learning materials that complement coursework already in place. A unit within the NIU Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development, Econ Illinois brings a wealth of resources to the educational community at all learning levels. Offering a customized approach, Econ Illinois strives to maximize student's learning outcomes by assessing needed resources and then providing or creating these resources to support and enhance their learning environment.

Affiliated with the national Council for Economic Education and its national network of educational non-profit centers/offices within states, Econ Illinois provides a variety of curriculum resources to support teachers and students in Illinois. Standards-based resources include online and in-person professional development for educators (graduate credit is available), student awards and competitions, as well as multi-media instructional materials for teachers and for students. Designed to develop a comprehensive skill set that fosters critical thinking and problem solving, these resources help educators prepare students to be college ready or to successfully transition into the workforce.

Econ Illinois, in its approach to partner with schools and educators, differs from other educational organizations. With teachers as the primary target market, the multiplier effect serves to impact a much greater number of students over the course of each educator's career, providing more than any effort that targets students alone. While we partner to support students in all aspects of their educational career, this educator focus enables a rich foundation for student engagement in schools that utilize our programs and resources. Despite the ever changing climate in schools, this educator driven programming brings versatility to the Exchange, allowing it to meet the needs of students in their local learning environment.

In building the IL Pathways STEM Finance Learning Exchange, Econ Illinois works to create a sustainable framework of partners that facilitate engagement opportunities and resources as outlined in the nine key functions listed here, as well as to identify funding sources to support initiatives that prepare students for finance-related careers.

Key functions the Finance Learning Exchange is working to facilitate include:

- e-learning curriculum resources
- access to classroom and lab space, equipment, and related educational resources
- student organizations & activities
- internships, adult mentoring & work-based learning opportunities
- student challenges & project management resources
- professional development resources for educators and school administrators integrated and aligned across middle school and high school, and community college instruction
- STEM career development and outreach resources
- tools and resources to assist schools with customized education plans and transitions to post-secondary programs
- review and assessment of programs; work with schools to continuously improve performance

IV. Overview

Students experience a variety of opportunities and obstacles as they participate in their education journey. Youth are provided with varying degrees of support and guidance from home that may be coupled with a school district's lack of resources, outdated technology, or even the inaccessibility of courses. For an increasing number of students, there are challenging circumstances that make it difficult to attend school; many who struggle with understanding content and have little time left to consider or pursue what they are interested in learning. Community colleges, trade schools and universities have a percentage of student applicants that are not prepared to succeed at the postsecondary education level.

Meanwhile, employers in most industry sectors report having difficulty finding individuals qualified for some positions. These situations are enhanced by a sluggish economy, which does not provide the resources and incentives necessary for schools and communities to change the educational climate on their own.

This is where Learning Exchanges fulfill a critical role. Who is involved with supporting/guiding the process? Illinois STEM Learning Exchanges are integrated into a support structure with statewide networks of educational partners, businesses, industry associations, labor organizations, and other organizations. These partners collaborate to provide assessment of local need, support for identifying and bridging relationships, and resources to enable local initiatives to succeed.

Illinois Pathways is an innovative State of Illinois-led STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) initiative supported by a partnership between the State of Illinois' lead education and economic development agencies, which include:

- Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
- Illinois State Board of Education
- Illinois Community College Board
- Illinois Board of Higher Education
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission
- Illinois Department of Employment Security

The Finance Learning Exchange is positioned to facilitate or help create programs and targeted resources to support local educational programs and coursework. Driven by demand for a regional workforce and the educational opportunities that this requires, each solution is unique and requires the identification and collaboration of multiple partners.

A primary challenge to be addressed by the FLE is the need for financial capital. For maximum impact on the economic and financial literacy of Illinois students, funding this initiative is critical:

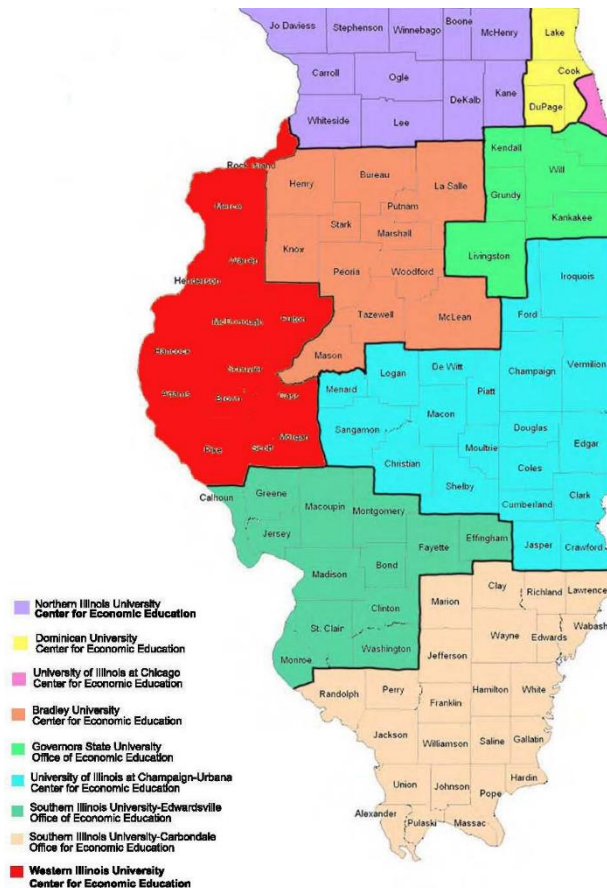
- To direct the infrastructure needed to build capacity statewide to enhance classroom rigor and the understanding of curriculum concepts.
- To provide work-based learning opportunities for students to participate and apply what they have learned toward innovative solutions, showcasing their competency to future employers.
- To bring best practices in coursework to school districts lacking opportunities for students interested in pursuing finance-related careers.
- To provide financial literacy curriculum and resources to students regardless of the career path, to enable each student to be successful in reaching their educational goals and in their personal life.

V. About Econ Illinois

Econ Illinois is the premier provider of economic education programs for K-12 schools throughout the state with over 65 years of experience in providing teacher professional development, curriculum resources and programs in basic economics, personal finance and entrepreneurship education. A 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization, Econ Illinois is affiliated with the national Council for Economic Education and resides in the NIU Division of Outreach, Engagement, and Regional Development.

While Econ Illinois does not receive ongoing governmental support, it does have extensive experience with statewide policy and programming. Econ Illinois was commissioned by the Office of Governor in Illinois to provide leadership in the development and implementation of the educational program titled the Illinois Global Economics and Finance High School Program from 2002-2006; has written curriculum for the long-standing Bank at School curriculum of the state treasurer’s office and was one of the leading organizations involved in the establishment of the Illinois Jump\$tart Coalition. Econ Illinois was instrumental in the creation of the 1997 Illinois State Standards that included K-12 standards and benchmarks in economics for the first time. Econ Illinois was again instrumental as the social science standards were reviewed and revised in 2015. With this revision, the Illinois Social Science Standards now include financial literacy standards for the first time. Econ Illinois has been called to participate in the HR 477 Advisory Committees, Committees that have been established pursuant to House Resolution 477 adopted by the Illinois House in 2015 which addresses various recommendations related to financial literacy as well as postsecondary and workforce readiness in Illinois.

Econ Illinois provides economic and financial literacy programs and services starting at the elementary level and extending throughout adulthood, enabling individuals to participate effectively in the economy as competent decision-makers, responsible and knowledgeable consumers, prudent savers and investors, and productive employees, employers, and entrepreneurs. Econ Illinois’ programs help educators integrate the teaching of economics across all grade levels and subject areas, developing a comprehensive and sequential curriculum for economics and personal finance. Together and in partnership with leaders from business, labor, agriculture, education, and government, Econ Illinois is dedicated to increasing economic literacy and critical thinking skills in Illinois. An affiliate of the national Council for Economic Education, Econ Illinois is the oldest continuously active state council in the national network. Econ Illinois is the State Council office with Centers of Economic Education, each housed at a different university to provide local programming and support. Econ Illinois, in tandem with our Centers, realizes an annual total student impact of over 160,000.



Revised 5.1.

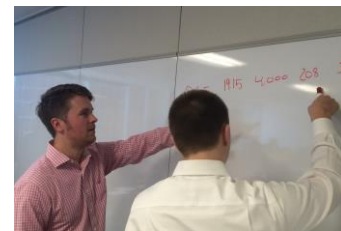
VI. Key Initiatives & Projects

Information about the nine Illinois Learning Exchanges, including specific pathways of study, coursework required for certifications, associate degrees and postsecondary study within career clusters are provided on the [Illinois Pathways](#) website. Here, one will also find information and tools related to career exploration, workforce resources, training opportunities, and job searches. Engagement models are designed to provide students with exposure to careers in finance-related businesses. Models are replicable across the state as industry firms self-identify for partnership with local schools or programs of study.

Teacher, Administrator and Guidance Counselor presentations: Panel presentations with industry leaders, available by request, lead a dialog with high school and community college educators to explore ways to introduce, support and guide students interested in a finance-related career or in taking business/entrepreneurship coursework.

Student presentations: Presentations are available through school districts' requests for students considering or interested in finance-related careers. Industry professionals lead an interactive dialog about their career field and experiences. Information is also shared about industry and regional employment needs and projections.

Student field trips to industry sites: High school student groups are invited to visit a business firm to gain a real world understanding of the variety of jobs available within a particular career field and the educational background and experiences necessary for success.



Finance industry speakers in the classroom: Industry professionals are available to visit a classroom or school of their choice or to be paired with a classroom involved with Econ Illinois programming. Speakers share about their job, educational background and experiences, and may include leading a finance-related curriculum activity.

Online curriculum resources and professional development: An online searchable library of curriculum resources is under construction. Resources were identified this past year, including: curriculum, curriculum assessments, classroom activities, projects, finance-related apps, podcasts, videos, professional development webinars & tutorials and infographics to support the educational continuum for finance-related pathways of study. Resources continue to be populated online.

Financial literacy online resources: A robust clearinghouse of financial literacy resources has been identified and is being vetted for population into an online searchable database. A coordinated effort is underway to reach individuals along the educational continuum who most need financial literacy support, regardless of career cluster being pursued. Examples include FAFSA, credit, and loan resources.



Key Initiatives & Projects (cont.)



Student Challenges: Two high school competitions engaged 835 Students from 30 schools across the state. Programs will be expanding to include an optional industry-based project for each competition.

Cohort of statewide teachers for mentor network: Econ Illinois is drawing from a cohort of over 75 award-winning educators that have participated in Econ Illinois programs and professional development. These educators have excelled above their colleagues when using our curriculum resources to build partnerships and mentorships regionally across the state.



Customized Professional Development:

Conference sessions and workshops are available upon request for schools and can be focused on the integration of economics and financial literacy across subject areas or disciplines, the finance career cluster, learning standards and/or financial literacy topics.

VII. Opportunities for Engagement in Illinois

Econ Illinois requests that stakeholders throughout the state consider joining us in providing engaged learning opportunities for Illinois students. Business firms and companies with a presence in Illinois, foundations and non-profit agencies, educational organizations and communities, and individuals from all sectors in the economy are invited to support the Finance Learning Exchange in facilitating learning opportunities for students, educators, and individuals interested in and involved with the finance industry or finance-related careers.

Engagement opportunities:

- Panel presentation member (typically one of five) for school districts or at teacher conferences
- Presenter (along with Econ Illinois) for student audiences
- Host a student group at your firm

Sample Agenda:

- Introduction of company
- Staff presentations about their finance-related roles/careers
- Facilitation and/or assistance with math activities
- A tour of the office working environment
- Catered Lunch provided by company – great time for one-on-one dialog with visitors
- Closing remarks, opportunity for visitors to provide feedback
- Industry professional(s) engaged as a speaker
 - At student competitions
 - At teacher professional development events
 - At a school and/or classroom(s)
- Financial support for the FLE program initiatives

Contact information:

Nancy Hanlon Harrison
President & Executive Director

Econ Illinois

nhh1@niu.edu

Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
Ph: 815.753.0356

Beth Metzler
VP for Programs & Partnerships
and STEM Finance Learning Exchange

Econ Illinois

bmetzler@niu.edu

Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115
Ph: 815.753.6930