



OFFICE OF ILLINOIS STATE TREASURER

MICHAEL W. FRERICHS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Illinois Treasurer Frerichs Marks Bright Start's 25th Anniversary with Record Growth During College Savings Month

As Bright Start 529 turns 25, Illinois State Treasurer Michael Frerichs is announcing record asset growth to more than \$14 billion for Illinois' flagship 529 college savings plan.

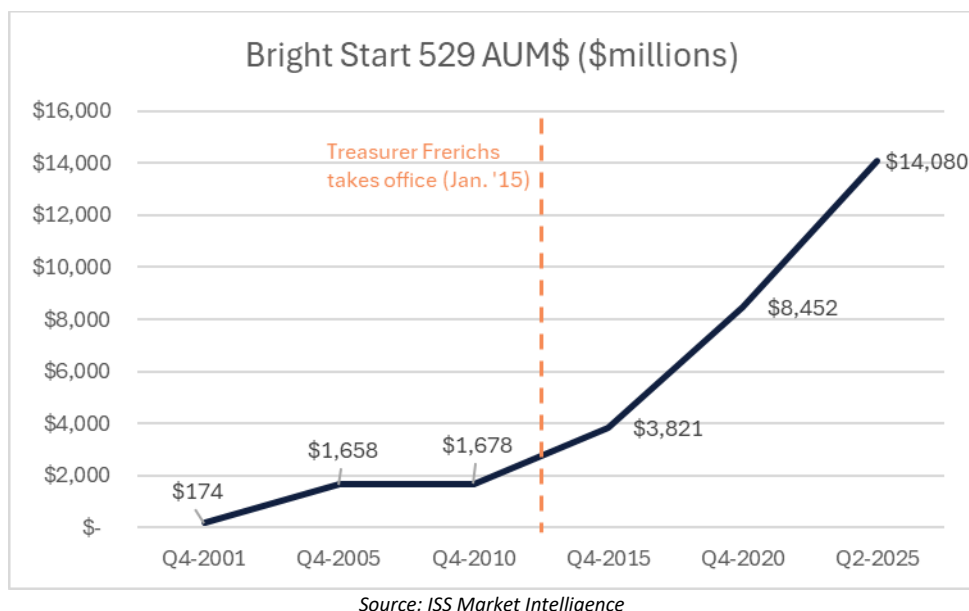
The news comes as the Illinois State Treasurer's Office kicks off College Savings Month, which falls in September. Sponsored and launched by the State of Illinois in the year 2000, the Bright Start 529 College Savings Plan is designed for higher education savings. Treasurer Frerichs also sponsors Bright Directions, a 529 plan for families who prefer to work with a financial advisor. Over the past 25 years, more than 250,000 students have used their IL 529 college savings funds to attend hundreds of universities, colleges, trade schools, vocational programs and apprenticeships.

"Parents can sleep better at night knowing they're prepared to pay for future education when the time comes," Treasurer Frerichs said. "As a father of two toddlers, I know firsthand how long those sleepless nights can be. Bright Start 529 is how Illinois creates a college-going culture and helps Illinois families confidently plan for the future."

Earning National Recognition as a Top-Rated 529 Plan

As of July 31, 2025, the plan had over 327,000 accounts with \$14 billion assets under management. This year alone, 22,000 accounts have been opened and all account owners have contributed about \$800 million for college savings. The numbers speak for themselves.

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The combined IL 529 College Savings plans count more than \$22B in assets.

Throughout the years, Bright Start 529 has been recognized as a leader in the 529 industry. Morningstar, an investment research company, recently [rated Bright Start 529 as a top choice](#) for education savers today. CNBC.com called Bright Start 529 one of “the [best college savings plan](#) in the nation.” And Business Insider hailed Bright Start 529 as “a [top-rated 529 plan](#).”

*“As one of five gold-rated 529 plans in the country,” said **Treasurer Frerichs**, “Illinois families can invest in Bright Start 529 with confidence. Bright Start is one of the nation’s biggest and best 529 plans, and we plan to keep growing until all Illinois families are saving for their kids’ future educational expenses.”*

The Bright Start 529 Advantage

Bright Start 529 offers a variety of benefits:

- **Unique tax advantages:** Tax-deferred growth and 100% tax-free withdrawals for qualified expenses. Illinois taxpayers can also reduce their state taxable income by up to \$20,000 per year when married and filing jointly or up to \$10,000 when filing individually.
- **Range of investment portfolios:** Professionally managed investment portfolios to fit your life situation, risk tolerance, and savings goals.
- **Flexible:** Families can pay for a range of qualified higher educational expenses to eligible schools nationwide, or transfer funds to eligible beneficiaries.
- **Low fees and expenses:** Bright Start 529 is among the lowest cost 529 plans in the country, which can mean more money for college.

*“We kept coming back to Bright Start given how well it’s performed and its reputation. It’s professionally managed, so we can trust that we don’t need to watch it every day. The cost savings are great, and it’s less expensive than other funds we researched.” **Marlén Cortez Morris, Chicago, IL***

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About Bright Start 529

The Bright Start Direct-Sold 529 College Savings Program ("Bright Start 529") and the Bright Directions Advisor-Guided 529 College Savings Program ("Bright Directions 529") are part of the Illinois College Savings Pool and are designed to qualify as qualified tuition programs under the provisions of Section 529 of the Internal Revenue Code. Bright Start 529 and Bright Directions 529 are sponsored by the State of Illinois and administered by the Illinois State Treasurer, as Trustee.

TIAA-CREF Tuition Financing, Inc. (TFI), serves as the Bright Start 529 plan manager. TIAA-CREF Individual & Institutional Services, LLC, Member FINRA, serves as distributor and underwriter for Bright Start 529. Union Bank & Trust Company serves as Program Manager, and Northern Trust Securities, Inc. acts as Distributor of the advisor-sold plan. Investments in Bright Start and Bright Directions are not guaranteed or insured by the State of Illinois, the Illinois State Treasurer, TFI, Union Bank & Trust Company, Northern Trust Securities, Inc., the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or any other entity.

An investor should consider the investment objectives, risks, and charges and expenses associated with municipal fund securities before investing. This and other important information is contained in the fund prospectuses and the Bright Start Program Disclosure Statement and Bright Directions Program Disclosure Statement, which can be obtained from your financial professional, on BrightStart.com, and BrightDirections.com and should be read carefully before investing. You can lose money by investing in a portfolio. Each of the portfolios involves investment risks, which are described in the Program Disclosure Statement.

An investor should consider, before investing, whether the investor's or designated beneficiary's home state offers any state tax or other benefits such as financial aid, scholarship funds, and protection from creditors that are only available for investments in such state's 529 plan. Investors should consult a tax advisor.

If you'd like more information, please contact Jenna Jaynes of **Swanson Russell** at **402-437-6406**.

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