

SCHOOLS: Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2002, states and the nation have championed high standards for all students and focused on highly qualified teachers. In its goal to ensure higher student achievement, NCLB emphasizes achievement test scores and school accountability, which highlight achievement gaps between socially and economically disadvantaged children and their wealthier peers.

Because of NCLB, we now better understand Illinois' dramatic disparities in student achievement outcomes across ages and settings. The achievement gap persists between White and Black students and White and Latino students for test scores, high school graduation rates and college matriculation and graduation. Blacks, Latinos and low-income students graduate high school at lower rates than White and Asian students both statewide and in Chicago. They are also less likely to attend or finish college.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is administered in grades four and eight and is the only longitudinal, nationwide test that measures students' knowledge in specific subjects. On the NAEP, Illinois students' scores are generally similar to the U.S. average in reading, math, science and writing. However, in 2007, the percentage of Illinois eighth graders considered "proficient" on the NAEP were: 31 percent in math, 30 percent in reading, 27 percent in science, and 37 percent in writing. The percentage of eighth graders considered "advanced" were: 7 percent in math, 2 percent in reading, 3 percent in science, and 2 percent in writing.

All public schools are accountable for meeting Illinois Learning Standards, which define what all Illinois students should know and be able to do in core areas as a result of elementary and secondary schooling. The standards were mandated in 1997 and have not changed in a decade. Students in grades three through eight also must take the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), which assesses proficiency in math and reading every year, science in grades four and seven, and writing in grades three, five, six and eight according to state learning standards.

Additionally, all Illinois juniors must take the Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE), which measures achievement in reading, math, science and writing, and includes the ACT test. Starting in 2005-2006, most Illinois students must take the PSAE to receive a high school diploma.

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While average Illinois students' scores on the ACT test are comparable to the national average, only about 20 percent of all students are considered college ready. Recent data show that Black and Latino students consistently have lower ACT scores than their White peers. The ACT assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work.

When comparing test scores between public school students and charter school students, average scores vary greatly, with some schools consistently scoring higher than the Illinois average and others consistently scoring lower. A 2008 RAND Corporation report found only small differences in average achievement gains between Chicago charters and public schools, and concluded that these marginal gains may be due to the unique status of charter schools or because they "eliminate the change of schools between eighth to ninth grade." The report indicates that more research is needed to determine the impact of charter schools on student achievement.

Experts agree that standards-based assessments, like the ISAT and PSAE, are an imperfect way to measure student achievement, and proficiency on these tests does not necessarily translate into success in college or in the workforce. All Illinois students would benefit from revised assessments

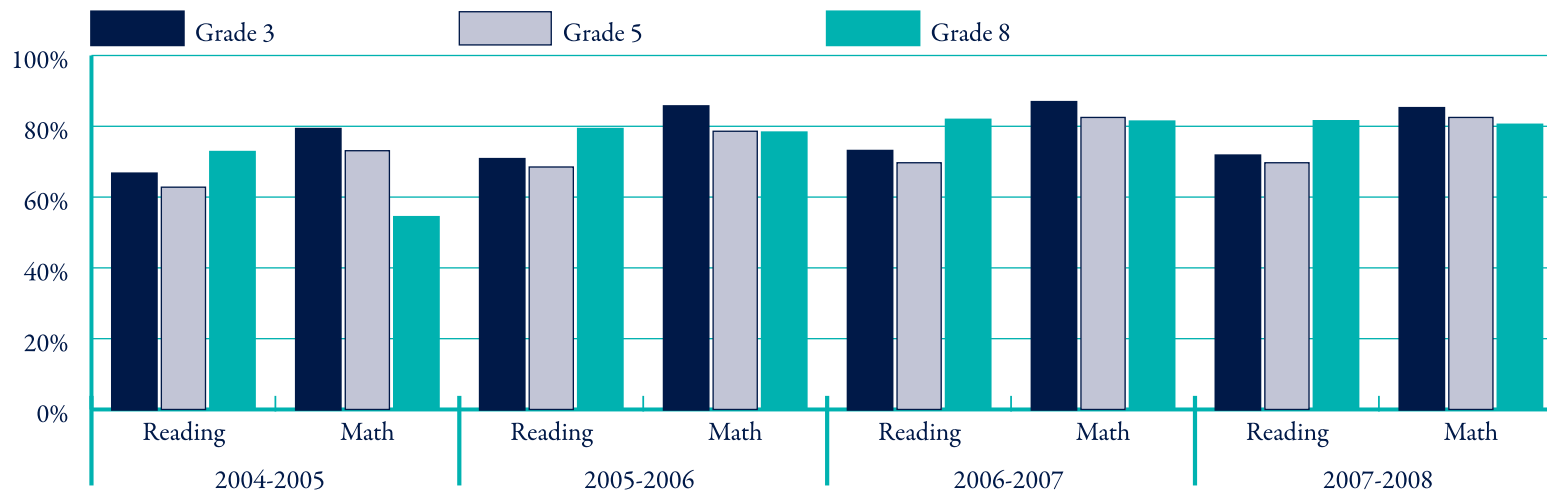


that actually test knowledge and understanding, as well as more clearly defined and more demanding learning standards. Fortunately, in 2008, Illinois became part of the American Diploma Project (ADP), which will help raise high school standards, strengthen assessments and curriculum, and align expectations with the demands of college and careers.

Illinois' participation in the ADP should bring clearer, more rigorous learning standards that will give students a strong foundation to prepare them for college and career, making them more competitive in a 21st century global marketplace and ensuring the stability of Illinois' economy.

Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Percentage of Illinois Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards on the ISAT



Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Percentage of Illinois Charter School and Comparable School District Students Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Reading Exam Standards, 2007

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 8
Illinois total	73.0%	69.7%	81.8%
Ft. Bowman charter	77.8%	44.4%	85.0%
Cahokia District 187	65.8%	56.6%	62.6%
Prairie Crossing charter	90.2%	94.4%	88.0%
Fremont District 79	86.2%	89.1%	92.8%
Woodland District 50	84.4%	77.9%	88.2%
Robertson charter	56.0%	38.5%	73.7%
Decatur District 61	58.8%	49.2%	67.2%
Springfield Ball charter	73.3%	66.7%	89.2%
Springfield District 186	59.3%	57.1%	68.5%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

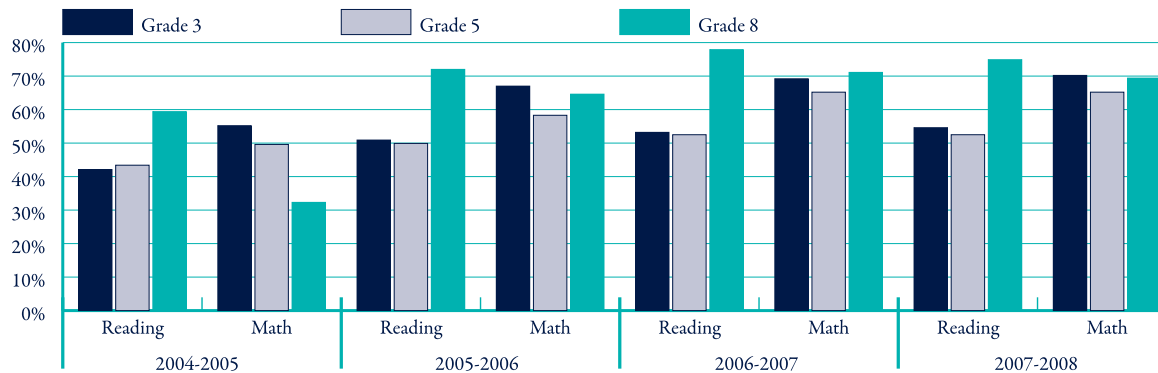
Percentage of Illinois Charter School and Comparable School District Students Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Math Exam Standards, 2007

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 8
Illinois total	86.8%	82.5%	81.3%
Ft. Bowman charter	83.3%	50.0%	85.0%
Cahokia District 187	91.9%	80.1%	66.7%
Prairie Crossing charter	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Fremont District 79	95.0%	93.8%	94.2%
Woodland District 50	92.1%	88.9%	90.1%
Robertson charter	76.0%	65.4%	68.4%
Decatur District 61	76.2%	75.8%	65.8%
Springfield Ball charter	86.7%	88.9%	97.3%
Springfield District 186	76.9%	73.8%	67.1%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Percentage of Chicago Public School Students Meeting or Exceeding Standards on the ISAT



Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Percentage of Chicago Charter School Students Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Math Exam Standards, 2007

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 8
Illinois total	86.8%	82.5%	81.3%
Chicago Charter Schools			
The Academy	NA	NA	60.0%
ASPIRA	NA	NA	68.6%
Bronzeville Lighthouse	63.0%	71.7%	NA
Catalyst	NA	39.0%	NA
Chicago International	81.6%	71.4%	79.3%
Chicago Math & Science	NA	NA	89.7%
Chicago Virtual	76.0%	61.9%	41.4%
Choir Academy	71.4%	46.2%	66.7%
Galapagos	68.4%	50.0%	NA
KIPP	NA	72.2%	100.0%
L.E.A.R.N.	82.8%	68.2%	78.6%
Legacy	72.7%	NA	NA
Locke	85.7%	83.0%	84.2%
Namaste	76.7%	NA	NA
Passages	91.3%	91.7%	NA
Perspectives	NA	NA	80.0%
Providence Englewood	72.7%	57.9%	NA
Shabazz	76.3%	100.0%	72.8%
UCCS	77.8%	76.9%	80.8%
UNO	78.7%	79.6%	80.5%
Young Women's	NA	NA	56.9%
Comparable District			
Chicago District 299	69.2%	65.2%	71.1%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

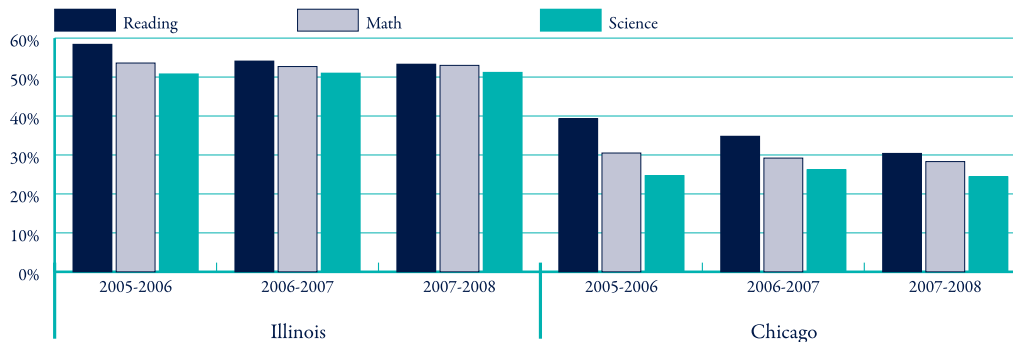
Percentage of Chicago Charter School Students Meeting or Exceeding ISAT Reading Exam Standards, 2007

	Grade 3	Grade 5	Grade 8
Illinois total	73.0%	69.7%	81.8%
Chicago Charter Schools			
The Academy	NA	NA	59.1%
ASPIRA	NA	NA	68.6%
Bronzeville Lighthouse	32.6%	39.1%	NA
Catalyst	NA	30.5%	NA
Chicago International	55.5%	49.3%	78.4%
Chicago Math & Science	NA	NA	87.2%
Chicago Virtual	84.0%	71.4%	62.1%
Choir Academy	66.7%	53.8%	88.9%
Galapagos	57.9%	39.4%	NA
KIPP	NA	46.4%	94.2%
L.E.A.R.N.	51.6%	54.5%	85.7%
Legacy	50.0%	NA	NA
Locke	67.3%	74.5%	94.7%
Namaste	56.7%	NA	NA
Passages	81.8%	87.5%	NA
Perspectives	NA	NA	78.4%
Providence Englewood	59.1%	63.2%	NA
Shabazz	62.7%	100.0%	80.2%
UCCS	59.6%	57.5%	80.0%
UNO	62.6%	64.1%	87.3%
Young Women's	NA	NA	76.5%
Comparable District			
Chicago District 299	53.2%	52.5%	77.9%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding Expectations on the PSAE, Illinois and Chicago



Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress Exam, Illinois

	Year	Scale Score		Illinois Achievement Level (% at or above)		
		Illinois	U.S.	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Math						
4th grade	2000	223	224	63%	20%	2%
	2003	233	234	73%	32%	5%
	2005	233	237	74%	32%	5%
	2007	237	239	79%	36%	6%
8th grade	2000	275	272	67%	26%	4%
	2003	277	276	66%	29%	6%
	2005	278	278	68%	29%	5%
	2007	280	280	70%	31%	7%
Reading						
4th grade	2003	216	216	61%	31%	8%
	2005	216	217	62%	29%	7%
	2007	219	220	65%	32%	8%
8th grade	2003	266	261	77%	35%	3%
	2005	264	260	75%	31%	3%
	2007	263	261	75%	30%	2%
Science						
4th grade	2000	150	145	68%	31%	3%
	2005	148	149	64%	27%	2%
8th grade	2000	148	148	59%	29%	3%
	2005	148	147	58%	27%	3%
Writing						
8th grade	2007	160	154	90%	37%	2%

Source: National Center on Education Statistics

Academic Assessments

ISAT: The Illinois Standards Achievement Test is administered in grades 3 through 8 in reading and math, and in grades 4 and 7 in science.

PSAE: Illinois juniors take the Prairie State Achievement Examination which includes the ACT and assesses if they are academically prepared for college and work. The test measures reading, math, science and writing.

NAEP: The National Assessment of Educational Progress, or the “Nation’s Report Card,” is the only longitudinal, nationwide measure of student performance. Administered for more than 30 years, the NAEP allows comparison of student achievement, across states and over time.

Achievement Gap on Average Math and Reading Scores by Grade, Illinois and U.S.

	2000	2003	2005	2007
Reading				
Illinois White-Black Gap				
Grade 4	NA	24.0	36.3	28.7
Grade 8	NA	28.9	28.0	27.2
U.S. White-Black Gap				
Grade 4	NA	29.8	28.7	26.6
Grade 8	NA	26.8	27.4	26.5
Illinois White-Latino Gap				
Grade 4	NA	31.0	30.9	24.4
Grade 8	NA	25.9	18.5	20.6
U.S. White-Latino Gap				
Grade 4	NA	27.7	26.3	25.8
Grade 8	NA	26.8	27.4	26.5
Math				
Illinois White-Black Gap				
Grade 4	32.9	33.8	32.6	32.0
Grade 8	33.1	39.9	40.3	38.0
U.S. White-Black Gap				
Grade 4	30.4	26.9	26.0	25.9
Grade 8	32.9	33.8	32.6	32.0
Illinois White-Latino Gap				
Grade 4	23.5	26.6	25.7	24.7
Grade 8	26.5	30.4	23.9	25.7
U.S. White-Latino Gap				
Grade 4	26.2	21.3	20.6	21.3
Grade 8	23.5	26.6	25.7	24.7

Note: Score differences are calculated based on differences between unrounded average scale scores.

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics

Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Average ACT Composite Scores, Illinois and U.S.

	Illinois	U.S.
1997	21.2	21.0
1998	21.4	21.0
1999	21.4	21.0
2000	21.5	21.0
2001	21.6	21.0
2002*	20.1	20.8
2003	20.2	20.8
2004	20.3	20.9
2005	20.3	20.9
2006	20.5	21.1
2007	20.5	21.2
2008	20.7	21.1

* Note: In 2002, Illinois adopted statewide ACT testing for all 11th grade students.

Source: ACT

ACT College Readiness for the High School Class of 2008, Illinois and U.S.

	% Illinois Students Meeting Benchmarks	% U.S. Students Meeting Benchmarks
Number tested	143,734	1,421,941
Total	22%	22%
English	66%	68%
Math	40%	43%
Reading	47%	53%
Science	27%	28%

Source: ACT

Percentage of Illinois High School Class of 2008 Meeting ACT Benchmarks for College Readiness by Race/Ethnicity

	English	Math	Reading	Science	Composite
ACT Benchmark Score	18	22	21	24	–
Total	66%	40%	47%	27%	22%
White	76%	49%	58%	34%	28%
Black	37%	10%	18%	5%	3%
Latino	46%	20%	26%	10%	7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	79%	65%	59%	43%	37%
American Indian/Alaska Native	60%	32%	43%	20%	15%

Source: ACT

Illinois Charter High Schools' Average ACT Composite Scores, 2007

	ACT Average
Illinois total	20.3
Chicago Charter Schools	
The Academy	15.3
ASPIRA	17.1
Chicago International	18.5
Noble Street	19.5
North Lawndale	16.5
Perspectives	17.0
Young Women's	16.6
Youth Connections	14.6
Comparable District	
Chicago District 299	17.6
Cahokia Charter School	
Ft. Bowman	16.4
Comparable District	
Cahokia District 187	15.5
East St. Louis Charter Schools	
SIU-East St. Louis	15.2
Tomorrow's Builders	12.4
Comparable District	
East St. Louis District 189	15.0

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Percentage of Illinois Students Who Took Advanced Placement Exams by Race/Ethnicity

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	% Change
Total	39,592	41,733	45,188	50,835	55,852	41.1%
White	69.6%	68.9%	66.7%	64.5%	62.4%	26.4%
Black	5.7%	5.4%	6.3%	7.8%	9.4%	130.9%
Latino	8.7%	8.8%	9.5%	10.0%	11.2%	82.4%
Asian	11.6%	11.9%	11.8%	11.2%	11.3%	37.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	49.4%
Other	2.5%	2.7%	2.8%	2.9%	3.2%	77.6%
Not Stated	1.7%	2.1%	2.8%	3.4%	2.4%	94.2%

Source: College Board

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), Illinois and Chicago, 2006-2007

	Illinois	Chicago
Total schools	3,888	573
Number of schools making AYP overall	2,896	225
% Making AYP overall	74.5%	39.3%
% Making AYP: Reading	77.0%	43.3%
% Making AYP: Math	82.2%	54.3%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Adequate Yearly Progress for Title I* Schools, Illinois and Chicago, 2006-2007

	Illinois	Chicago
Total Title I schools	2,319	505
Schools that need School Improvement**	511	313
Average years in Improvement status	5.2	5.7
Total Title I districts	789	1
Districts that need School Improvement	150	1
Average years in Improvement status	4	4

* Schools receiving federal Title I funds are those in which low-income children make up at least 40 percent of student enrollment. Schools must use those funds for school-wide programs that serve all children.

** School Improvement is a designation for schools and districts that missed adequate yearly progress targets.

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Standards, Assessment and Accountability

Averaged Freshman Graduation Rates for Illinois Public Secondary Schools

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Total	86.0%	86.6%	87.4%	87.8%	85.9%	86.5%
White	91.0%	91.8%	92.2%	92.3%	92.2%	92.5%
Black	73.3%	74.0%	77.7%	78.3%	73.8%	74.9%
Latino	75.5%	75.9%	76.0%	77.1%	73.4%	75.7%
Asian/Pacific Islander	92.5%	91.9%	93.4%	94.1%	93.5%	93.4%
American Indian/ Alaska Native	77.8%	76.6%	86.0%	80.5%	72.7%	75.3%
Multiracial	—	87.9%	91.7%	88.2%	83.0%	87.6%
Limited English Proficient	64.5%	57.9%	62.8%	63.2%	69.1%	57.2%
Low-income	69.9%	71.1%	75.8%	76.5%	74.9%	74.9%
Male	83.8%	84.3%	85.4%	85.6%	83.1%	84.2%
Female	88.3%	88.8%	89.4%	89.9%	88.7%	88.8%

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

In order to improve high school accountability, an accurate method of calculating graduation rates that is uniform across states is necessary. New regulations under No Child Left Behind hold schools, districts and states responsible for improving graduation rates and require them to implement four-year adjusted cohorts.

Presented here are Illinois averaged freshman graduation rates, which are currently measured by the Illinois State Board of Education, and age-13 cohort graduation rates for the Chicago Public Schools. Averaged freshman graduation rates are not as accurate as an on-time graduation rates computed from a cohort of students using student record data.

School Districts with Lowest High School Graduation Rates, Illinois, 2007-2008

District	County	District Type	Low-Income	High School Graduation Rate
North Chicago SD 187	Lake	Unit	80.1%	47.8
City of Chicago SD 299	Cook	Unit	84.9%	66.0
J.S. Morton HSD 201	Cook	H.S.	59.9%	69.4
Waukegan CUSD 60	Lake	Unit	57.4%	69.6
Danville CCSD 118	Vermilion	Unit	65.9%	71.4
St. Elmo CUSD 202	Fayette	Unit	40.8%	72.4
North Greene USD 3	Greene	Unit	59.2%	72.5
Depue USD 103	Bureau	Unit	48.6%	72.7
Tri-Point CUSD 6-J	Livingston	Unit	27.5%	72.7
East Alton-Wood River CHSD 14	Madison	H.S.	46.4%	72.8
Decatur SD 61	Macon	Unit	64.5%	73.3
Centralia HSD 200	Marion	H.S.	46.9%	73.6
Panhandle CUSD 2	Montgomery	Unit	43.0%	73.9
Hoopeston Area CUSD 11	Vermilion	Unit	50.6%	73.9
Georgetown-Ridge Farm CUD 4	Vermilion	Unit	50.6%	74.2
Central A & M CUD 21	Shelby	Unit	26.1%	74.4
Peoria Heights CUSD 325	Peoria	Unit	45.7%	74.5
Iroquois County CUSD 9	Iroquois	Unit	47.2%	74.8
Mt. Vernon Township HSD 201	Jefferson	H.S.	29.6%	74.9

Source: Illinois State Board of Education

Graduation Rates for Age-13 Cohorts for All Chicago Public School Students

13 years old in:	Followed to age 18 in:	Graduation rate by age 18	Graduation rate by age 19
1994	1999	42.5%	51.3%
1995	2000	42.9%	51.2%
1996	2001	40.0%	50.0%
1997	2002	40.9%	51.9%
1998	2003	43.0%	54.2%
1999	2004	44.7%	56.1%
2000	2005	46.4%	56.4%
2001	2006	44.6%	58.6%*
2002	2007	47.1%*	—

* Rates calculated in 2007 are not comparable to earlier years. CPS began using a new student record system in 2006-2007 and the codes for recording missing students changed. This seems to have decreased the number of students counted as dropouts.

Source: Consortium on Chicago School Research

Graduation Rates for Age-13 Cohorts for All Chicago Public School Students by Race/Ethnicity

	13 years old in:	Followed to age 18 in:	Graduation rate by age 18	Graduation rate by age 19
White	1995	2000	47.0%	59.4%
	1997	2002	46.7%	62.0%
	1999	2004	53.2%	66.7%
	2001	2006	57.0%	71.5%*
	2002	2007	59.5%*	—
Black	1995	2000	39.8%	46.3%
	1997	2002	37.5%	45.8%
	1999	2004	40.1%	50.0%
	2001	2006	39.0%	52.6%*
	2002	2007	43.1%*	—
Latino	1995	2000	44.6%	54.4%
	1997	2002	41.9%	55.4%
	1999	2004	46.7%	59.8%
	2001	2006	47.2%	61.3%*
	2002	2007	47.9%*	—
Asian	1995	2000	65.0%	79.1%
	1997	2002	63.9%	80.2%
	1999	2004	66.6%	81.2%
	2001	2006	69.0%	84.2%*
	2002	2007	70.0%*	—

* Rates calculated in 2007 are not comparable to earlier years. CPS began using a new student record system in 2006-2007 and the codes for recording missing students changed. This seems to have decreased the number of students counted as dropouts.

Source: Consortium on Chicago School Research

Supportive School Environments Improve Student Performance, Chances of Graduating

By Elaine Allensworth

Co-Director for Statistical Analysis, Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago

In the past five years, people have been increasingly alarmed about low graduation rates in America's high schools. New statistics show that graduation rates are lower than had been generally reported at the local, state and federal levels. While these new statistics are more accurate than the older statistics, many are biased against the lowest-performing schools. These biases have angered many schools and districts.

There is no perfect method of calculating graduation rates. Good statistics depend on high-quality data systems that follow students as they transfer between schools, move across state lines, or simply stop coming to school. Illinois is developing a data system that will track students over time as they transfer between schools within the state. Unfortunately, once this system is in place, it will be four more years until we will be able to produce four-year cohort graduation and dropout rates.

Even with better data, we still face many difficult decisions about how to define graduation and dropout statistics. For example, if a student starts high school in one school and then transfers to another high school, which school should “get credit” for the student as a graduate or a dropout? How long should students be given to graduate? Should incarcerated students be counted as dropouts? What about students enrolled in GED or other alternative programs?

Despite these debates, experts agree on a number of facts. About 70 to 80 percent of students graduate in four years of high school in Illinois, as well as the nation, and graduation rates have not improved over the last several decades. Boys are less likely to graduate than girls. Differences by race are disturbing; only about 66 percent of Black and Latino students graduate, compared to about 80 percent of White students.

In the past few years, researchers have developed a better understanding of the factors that lead students to drop out. We can predict who will drop out years in advance, based on their course grades. In Chicago, where about 58 percent of students graduate, virtually all (97 percent) with “B” averages or better in ninth grade eventually graduate, compared to only about a quarter of those with a “D” average in ninth grade. Students' grades as far back as middle school can accurately identify students with a high risk of eventually dropping out. Grades in school are more predictive of graduating than students' other background factors, including race, economic status and previous test scores. There is no question that many factors external to high schools affect students' dropping out. But the most proximal factor, and the one educators have the most control over, is students' performance in school.

We know from our work in Chicago that the school environment makes a big difference for students' chances of passing courses and then graduating. Students do better in schools with trusting relationships between students and teachers, and where students see the work they do in their classes as preparation for their future. Graduation rates are better in schools where teachers work together cooperatively, where they feel responsible for all students—not just those in their classroom—and where programs and instruction are coherently aligned. Substantial improvements in the schools with the highest dropout rates would go a long way to improving the overall educational attainment of students in Illinois.

Reflections on Standards, Assessment, Accountability and NCLB

By Glenn W. “Max” McGee, Ph.D.

President, Illinois Math and Science Academy

In this 10th year of standards-based reform and Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) accountability, Illinois education has much to herald. Yet, for those who witnessed the dawning of the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS), our dreams, though not yet dashed, are fitful.

On one hand, there are a few rays of light. As measured by the ISAT, student achievement in elementary school has improved over the last decade. The number of teachers pursuing National Board of Professional Teaching Standards certification is growing, and standards exist for nearly 50 areas of teacher certification. Also, the Illinois State Board of Education recently recognized 508 Spotlight Schools for sustained achievement and 607 for Academic Improvement.

On the other hand, darkness prevails. Of approximately 120,000 Illinois seniors graduating this year, half do not meet Illinois reading, math or science standards. Even more alarmingly, three out of every four Illinois high school students from low-income families will graduate unable to meet these standards. The

size of the state’s achievement gap is one of the greatest in the nation.

A common perception is that “fixing” NCLB will remedy all that ails education. While NCLB has many shortcomings, it has highlighted the needs of low-income students and other populations that have been neglected. In fact, the four greatest impediments to the success of standards-based reform also offer the most promise in the next decade:

1. Standards-based reform has focused more on curriculum than on instruction. Too many schools believe that aligning the curriculum will result in improved student learning. While this will add some value, the standards must be taught in the manner in which each child learns best. Balancing the ILS with teaching and leadership standards will be far more fruitful in producing results.
2. The ILS are too broad and often too vague to lead to students’ deep conceptual understanding of rigorous concepts. The American Diploma Project, a promising P-20 initiative, has the potential to

transform the ILS into a system with both depth and breadth. Significantly reducing the number of standards, making them rigorous, and developing benchmarks that incorporate 21st century learning technologies will enable students to acquire the deep conceptual understanding that will prepare them for success.

3. Standards-based reform has been driven by the ISAT, which imperfectly measures a fraction of the standards. Illinois’ performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and ISAT are very discrepant. ISAT results are not aligned with the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) results. Plus, “meeting” the ISAT standard will not likely translate into scoring a 20 on the ACT. Each of these facts demonstrates the need to overhaul the state assessment system. Assessments must be authentic intellectual tasks that enable students to demonstrate they can use and apply what they learn.

4. Standards-based reform requires a resource investment. Professional development for school leaders and educators to teach standards in a way that will lead to deep conceptual understanding is a minimum investment. Driving state resources to schools that need them most, while providing supports, coaching and accountability measures, will enable them to replicate, if not surpass, the success of Spotlight Schools.

Our schools need fewer, clearer and more rigorous standards. Our students need challenging, performance-based assessments. Our teachers need training in both learning and performance standards. Our children need teachers who hold the highest expectations for every child, and who engage each child in learning through inquiry, imagination, experimentation and discovery. Our schools, especially those in poverty, need more funding targeted to and accountable for replicating the success of Illinois’ Spotlight Schools. And they need all of it now.