

# THE STATE WE'RE IN

## A Report Card on Public Education in Illinois

### Executive Summary

*The State We're In: 2012* assesses academic performance from early childhood through postsecondary and examines how Illinois compares to other states and nations as it works to prepare all students for the opportunities and challenges of today's world.

More than 2 million students attend Illinois public schools every day. To better understand how the state's educational system serves them, this biennial report:

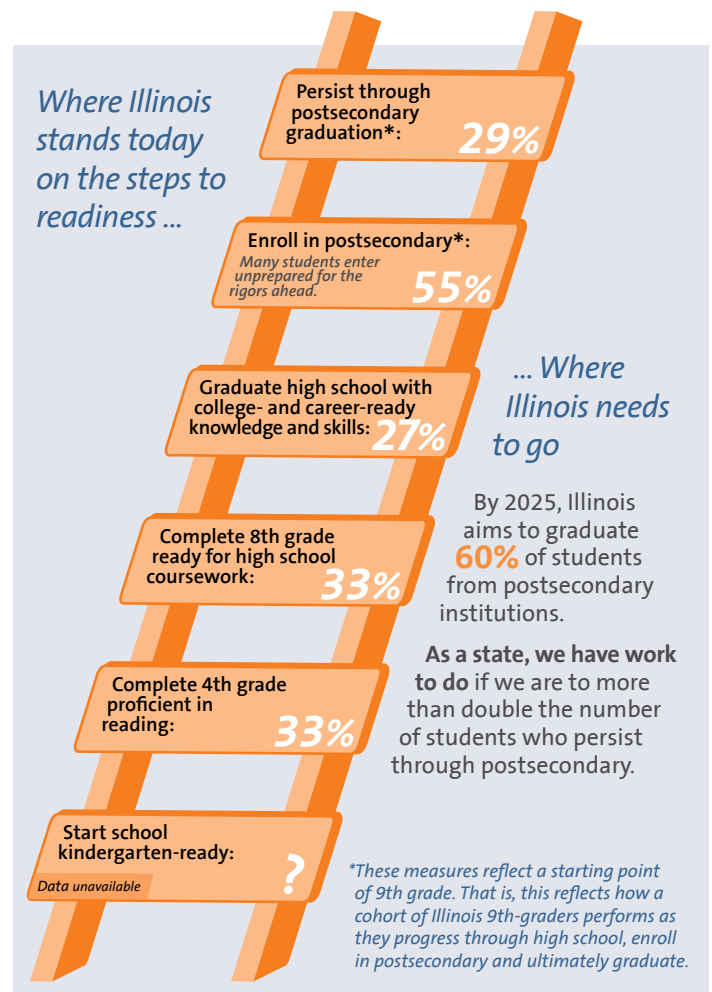
- Defines what it means to be academically prepared at key steps in a student's education;
- Spotlights learning conditions and climate within schools that support student success;
- Identifies demographic and economic changes in the state during the past decade;
- Describes reforms put in place to strengthen Illinois' education system that now must be implemented.

### Steps to Readiness

Illinois' academic performance has remained flat for much of the past decade. This suggests little prospect for improvement absent serious effort and change. While Illinois has taken important steps to improve, the impact on student achievement does not happen immediately.

- One-third of Illinois students complete 4th grade proficient in reading, a troubling indicator given decades of research that suggests students who read well by this point are dramatically more likely to succeed in school and in life.
- One-third of students begin high school academically prepared for the coursework ahead.
- At a time when eight of every 10 jobs require more than a high school diploma, fewer than three-quarters of Illinois students who begin high school will graduate and fewer than a third will earn a two- or four-year degree.
- These outcomes are even bleaker for low-income and minority students.

As a state, we must work urgently to meet the goal set by Illinois' education, legislative, civic and business leaders that 60 percent of students earn a postsecondary degree by 2025.



## Grading Illinois

**EARLY EDUCATION:** 2012: *Incomplete* 2010: *Incomplete*

Illinois continues to be a national leader in providing students access to early education programs that give them a strong, early start. Yet this represents less than one-third of our youngest children and fewer still may be served in the coming years due to budget constraints. Moreover, significant information gaps persist. As a state, we know little about whether students are “ready” for kindergarten and whether students eligible to receive bilingual early childhood instruction, in fact, get the services that state law now requires. As a result, Illinois receives an *Incomplete*.

Metric	Current	Rank
3-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool	20%	1st
4-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool	29%	15th
Children demonstrating readiness for kindergarten	<i>Data unavailable</i>	
English-language learners in appropriate programs		

**K-12:** 2012: *C-* 2010: *D*

Illinois’ academic performance has remained flat for much of the past decade. While students across nearly all demographic and economic groups improved slightly during recent years, this was not enough to raise the aggregate performance, and achievement gaps remain among the largest in the nation. Certainly, Illinois changed significantly during the past decade. Nearly half of Illinois students are low-income and, for the first time, more than half of schools statewide serve 40 percent or more economically disadvantaged students. Despite the modest academic performance, Illinois improved its national standing as other states confronting similar demographic realities slid. For this reason, Illinois receives a *C-*.

Metric	Current	Rank
4th-graders proficient in reading on NAEP	33%	27th
8th-graders proficient in math on NAEP	33%	28th
Students demonstrating college readiness on at least three subject benchmarks on the ACT	38%	3rd of 9
<i>Students who meet ACT College Readiness Benchmarks ... English = 18; Reading = 21; Math = 22; Science = 24 ... have a 50 percent chance of earning a B in an introductory college course.</i>		
Percentage of students graduating high school AND demonstrating college readiness on at least THREE of FOUR subject benchmarks on the ACT	27%	<i>Data unavailable</i>

**POSTSECONDARY READINESS AND SUCCESS:** 2012: *C+* 2010: *C*

At a time when postsecondary education matters more than ever, few students finish high school ready for further academic study or work. These students are far less likely to enroll in postsecondary and far more likely to drop out before they earn a two- or four-year degree. Compounding this challenge is the increasing expense. It costs an average family 21 percent of its income to send a student to a four-year public university, making Illinois one of the least affordable states. Illinois receives a *C+*.

Metric	Current	Rank
Students who enroll in postsecondary who go on to graduate	68%	<i>Data unavailable</i>
Community college students taking remedial courses ( <i>low value is best</i> )	49%	11th of 29
Percent of family income necessary to pay for college ( <i>low value is best</i> )	21%	46th
Adults 25+ with an associate degree or higher	38%	16th

## The Plan for Progress

The good news is Illinois has been developing comprehensive reforms to provide students with college- and career-ready knowledge and skills. The work ahead requires careful implementation, and lasting improvement takes time. As a state, we must build upon these and other reforms if we are to open the doors of opportunity for all students:

- Serving young children in need with early childhood programs that provide a strong start, and ensuring students eligible for bilingual early childhood instruction receive it.

- Creating a developmentally appropriate method to gauge whether students are academically, emotionally and socially ready as they begin their K-12 careers.
- Implementing the rigorous Common Core State Standards.
- Administering research-based school surveys to collect information about learning climate and conditions.
- Increasing expectations for teacher and principal candidates and creating evaluations that provide relevant feedback and support.
- Building a longitudinal data system that identifies where gaps and challenges persist.
- Revising school report cards to help families better understand how schools and districts serve students.

To read *The State We're In: 2012* and to learn more about how these grades were calculated,

please visit [www.advancemil.org](http://www.advancemil.org).  
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