

Trapped in Chicago's worst schools: Education outcomes in Chicago's lowest-performing public schools

By Joshua Dwyer, Director of Education Reform





The problem.....	3
Determining the lowest-performing schools in Chicago.....	4
The lowest-performing elementary schools in Chicago.....	5
State standards.....	5
Federal standards.....	6
Chronic truancy.....	7
Chicago’s lowest-performing elementary schools are failing students	8
The lowest-performing high schools in Chicago.....	9
State standards.....	9
Federal standards.....	10
Graduation and drop-out rates.....	11
Chicago’s lowest-performing high schools are failing students.....	12
The solution.....	13
Why it works.....	13
Appendix.....	14
The lowest-performing elementary schools in Chicago.....	14
The lowest-performing high schools in Chicago.....	15
Endnotes.....	16

The problem

In 2010, then state Sen. James Meeks, D-Chicago, introduced legislation that would have provided opportunity scholarships, commonly referred to as vouchers, to students attending the lowest-performing 10 percent of schools in Chicago.

While the bill passed the Illinois Senate – thanks, in part, to Meeks' position as head of the Senate Education Committee – it failed in the House and never reached the governor's desk.

Meeks' argument for the legislation was simple: Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools consistently fail their students. Giving these students financial support in the form a voucher, which they could take to any school they wanted, would have been their ticket out of these failing schools.

He's right. A look at 2012 Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, data of the city's lowest-performing schools shows just how bad the situation is:

- 75 percent of students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools failed to meet standards on the Illinois Standard Achievement Test, or ISAT, which measures basic competence in reading and math.
- 95 percent of juniors at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools failed to meet standards on the Prairie State Achievement Exam, or PSAE, meaning they can only draw simple conclusions from reading assignments and have trouble interpreting basic algebra.
- More than 20 percent of students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools scored in the "warning" category on state tests in reading, meaning they had a difficult time determining the main idea of a persuasive essay or the plot of a short story.
- Nearly half of all students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools scored in the "warning" category on state tests in math, meaning they can only do basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division problems.

These poor-performing schools have problems that many people, including politicians, believe are too great to overcome. Because of this, they are kept out of sight and out of mind. That means thousands of students are left behind. In total, 15,983 students attend Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and 5,389 students attend Chicago's lowest-performing high schools.

Dewey Elementary Academy of Fine Arts, located on Chicago's South Side, is one such example. There, fewer than 19 percent of students are ready for high school, and the school has never met federal benchmarks for student success.¹ Nearly 78 percent of its students are chronically truant.²

While a few children may succeed under these conditions, the vast majority of students attending a school like Dewey are never able to overcome the many obstacles in front of them.

Even though total funding and per-student funding at CPS has grown by more than 60 percent over the past decade, student achievement isn't where it needs to be.³

Throwing more money at the problem won't fix anything.

The fact of the matter is that current and future students do not have the luxury of waiting five or 10 years to see if such interventions will work. Every year they stay at a school like Dewey is another year they fall further behind their peers. And success in school is a direct link to success later in life with more steady employment, greater wages and higher self-confidence.

Chicago's lowest-performing high schools are no better. Fewer than 5 percent of students in these schools met state standards. In these schools, there are almost as many students graduating as there are dropping out.⁴ These schools are some of the most violent schools in the state.⁵

This report presents a clear picture of just how bad the 10 percent lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools in Chicago actually are. It examines how these schools compare to other schools across the district and the state, as well as to state and federal standards. It also looks at other statistics that are closely related to the quality of a school, including chronic truancy, and graduation and dropout rates.

Forcing students to continue to attend schools that have failed children for decades is wrong. Providing them with more educational options should be the state and districts' No. 1 priority.

This means lifting the charter school cap, creating an environment where online and blended learning can thrive and supporting choice programs – such as vouchers, tax credit scholarships and education-savings accounts – that would allow students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools to attend schools that better fit their learning styles and are more responsive to their needs.

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools need a way out – fast. Their futures depend on it.

Determining the lowest-performing schools in Chicago

There are a number of ways to determine what schools are the lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools in Chicago. This report uses the same criteria the state uses to assess whether a school is high- or low-quality: student scores on state exams.

Even though results for the lowest-performing Chicago schools are already low, most of the performance data used in this report likely overstates the quality of the city's poorest-performing elementary schools and high schools. Over the past decade, ISBE has continuously lowered standards to help districts and schools escape the penalties associated with not meeting federal education benchmarks.⁶

This report may understate the non-performance-related data, such as chronic truancy, and graduation and dropout rates. Often times, the data the state collects is incomplete and does not provide a clear view of the educational environment Illinois students encounter on a daily basis.

To determine what elementary schools made the list, this report looks at the percentage of students that met or exceeded standards on the Illinois Standard Achievement Test, or ISAT.

This report used the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards on the Prairie State Achievement Exam, or PSAE to determine its list of high schools.

What does it mean to not meet standards?

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, or ISBE, students who fail to meet standards on the ISAT in reading either “demonstrate an incomplete understanding of grade-level texts or have limited comprehension of grade-level texts,” depending on how low they score.⁷

In math, the same situation applies – students who fail to meet standards do not perform at grade level. Some of them can only do basic math, such as adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing whole numbers.⁸

On the PSAE, students who do not meet standards in reading may “demonstrate basic knowledge and skills in the subject,” but have a difficult time comprehending and analyzing texts. In math, students who score slightly below standards can understand single-step algebraic equations, while those that score well below standards have trouble comparing fractions with different denominators.⁹

This report eliminated from the list of elementary schools and high schools all selective public schools as well as those that serve certain populations such as special education students or high-school dropouts. For a full list of the lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools, please consult the Appendix.¹⁰

For the lowest-performing elementary schools, the report analyzed these statistics:

State standards – the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards in reading, mathematics and science combined; the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards in reading, mathematics and science; and the percentage of students who fell in the “warning” category in reading, mathematics and science

Federal standards – the percentage of students and the percentage of minorities who met federal standards

Chronic truancy – the percentage of students who had been absent without valid cause for at least nine days during the school year

For the lowest-performing high schools, the report examined:

State standards – the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards in reading, mathematics and science combined; the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards in reading, mathematics and science; and the percentage of students who fell in the “warning” category in reading, mathematics and science

Federal standards – the total percentage of students and the total percentage of minorities who met federal standards

Graduation rate and dropout rate – the percentage of freshman who graduated within four years and the percentage of students who left school between their ninth and 12th grade years.

The lowest-performing elementary schools in Chicago

Located on Chicago's South Side, Jackie Robinson Elementary School is the lowest-performing elementary school in Chicago. In the 2011-12 school year, only 9.2 percent of its students met or exceeded state standards on the Illinois Standard Achievement Test, or ISAT.¹¹

Robinson has had a troubled history. Its principal and a teacher resigned in 2010 after Chicago Public Schools received evidence that they had illegally used the actual ISAT test to prepare students to take the exam. It was also on the original list of schools that Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, debated closing in 2013.

The story is similar for many of the other 41 schools – which serve 15,635 students – that made this report's list of the lowest-performing elementary schools in Chicago. These schools are predominantly located on the city's South Side. Their populations are overwhelmingly low-income and black, with more than 90 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch.¹²

While many of these students come from difficult environments, that alone cannot be blamed for their low academic achievement, especially when some high-quality Chicago charter schools are raising the performance of students from similar backgrounds.

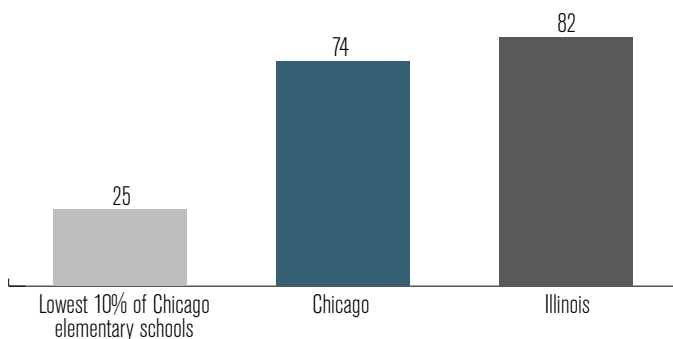
Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are consistently failing their students. These schools are places where students are provided a low-quality education that doesn't prepare them for their future.

State standards

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are underperforming their peers at the city and state level. In fact, only a small fraction of students from these schools are meeting or exceeding state standards.¹³

75 percent of students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools failed to meet state standards

Percent of students who met/exceeded standards on the ISAT



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

A student needs only to be performing at grade-level to meet standards.¹⁴ This means that a large majority of students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are unable to read and do math and science at grade level.

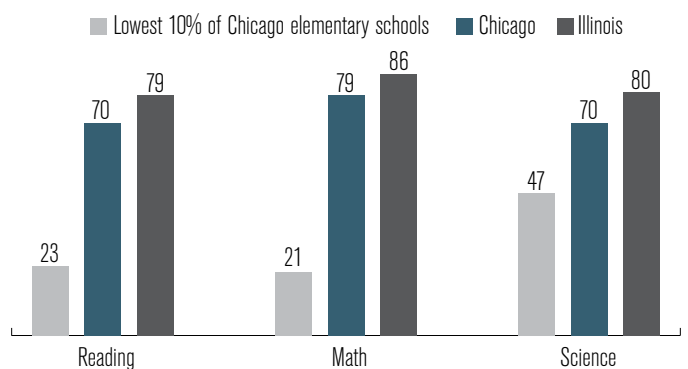
Breaking down the percentage of students who met or exceeded standards on the ISAT by subject reveals where students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are really struggling. Their weakest subject is math, followed closely by reading. They do slightly better in science, with almost half of students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools meeting or exceeding state standards.¹⁵

Eighth graders who met or exceeded standards in all of these subjects were able to comprehend grade level material. In reading, this means that they were able to identify characters' motivations, and a story's plot and theme. In science, it means that they were able to create a hypothesis and devise an experiment to test it. In math, it means that they could solve practical problems that involve integers, decimals, fractions, percentages and proportions.

Compared to the district and the state, Chicago's lowest-performing schools score well below average. More than two-thirds of all Chicago students met or exceeded standards in reading, math and science.¹⁶ For the state, these numbers were slightly higher.¹⁷

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools struggled to meet state standards in reading, math and science

Percent of students who met/exceeded standards on the ISAT in 2013



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

An examination of the percentage of students who scored significantly below standards shows just how much Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are failing their students.

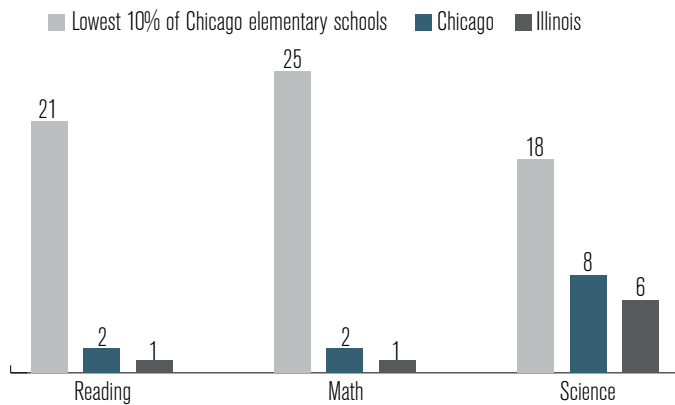
According to Illinois State Board of Education, or ISBE, students who miss state standards by a wide margin perform significantly below grade level. An eighth-grade student who scores in the "warning" category – the lowest category on the ISAT – in reading, for example, cannot identify the main idea of a reading passage and has trouble following the sequence of events.¹⁸ If this same student scores in the "warning" category

in math, he or she can only do one-step problems that involve whole numbers.¹⁹

Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools have a significantly higher percentage of students in the "warning" category than the state and the rest of Chicago.

Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are 20 times more likely than the rest of Illinois schools to have a student who is significantly behind grade level

Percent of students who scored in the "warning" category on the ISAT



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

Though these outcomes are already bleak, more students would be scoring in the "warning" category if the state's standards on the ISAT weren't among the most lax in the country.

For example, the "Mapping State Proficiency Standards onto NAEP Scales: 2005-2009" study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education ranked Illinois 41st in reading and 45th in math when it came to the rigor of its standards.²⁰

The ISAT is also not benchmarked to the Prairie State Achievement Exam, or PSAE or the ACT.

In "From High School to the Future: The Pathway to 20" – a study completed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago – researchers found that Chicago eighth-graders who just meet standards in math have less than a 5 percent chance of meeting ACT benchmarks for college readiness.²¹

The state has also admitted that ISAT standards do not set a high bar. In its recently denied request to the Department of Education to exempt itself from federal standards, ISBE stated that: "Currently ISAT results are not aligned to PSAE standards."²²

The state has taken some steps to align the ISAT with the PSAE. Once the two tests are aligned, ISBE is expecting approximately half of Illinois students will meet state standards on the test compared to 82 percent this year.²³

Once these changes are fully implemented, thousands of Chicago parents will realize that the poor-performing schools their children now attend are doing even worse than they originally thought.

Federal standards

Passed in 2001, the federal No Child Left Behind Act, or NCLB, forced states to establish their own accountability systems based on federal standards.

Under the law, each year the state, its districts and its schools must hit certain proficiency benchmarks to make adequate yearly progress, or AYP, which measures how well these institutions are doing at raising student achievement based on test results. If they fail to do so, they can be subjected to varying levels of interventions and sanctions by the state.

According to NCLB, schools failing to make AYP for two years must offer parents the opportunity to transfer their child to a school that is higher performing than the school their child currently attends. After three consecutive years of not meeting standards, schools must also offer students free tutoring services. If a school fails to make improvements under NCLB for three years, its entire staff can be fired and the state can take over the school.

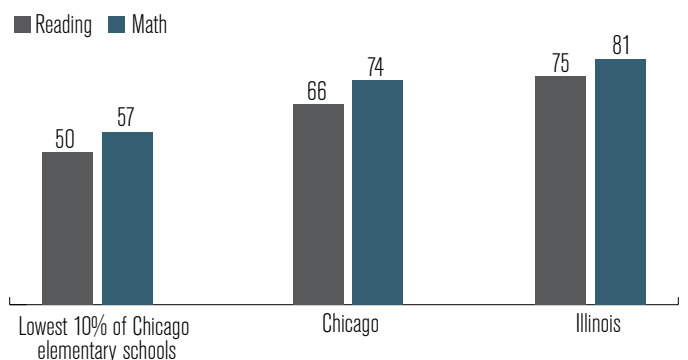
Under NCLB, however, the state has some leeway in how it determines whether a district, school or student has made AYP.

Unfortunately, over the past couple of years, ISBE has significantly lowered the bar on what it takes to make AYP. Essentially, districts, schools and students make AYP merely if test scores improve year over year, rather than based on whether they meet proficiency standards that measure whether students are at grade level and will succeed.²⁴

Even given these lax standards, 25 percent of students across Illinois failed to make AYP in reading. Slightly more made AYP in math.²⁵

Only half of students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools meet federal standards in reading

Percent of students who made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

Examining scores of minorities reveal a more disturbing trend. In Illinois, nearly two-thirds of black students made AYP in reading and math, respectively – 15 percentage points below the state average in reading and 16 percentage points lower in math. For Hispanic students, the numbers were slightly better.²⁶

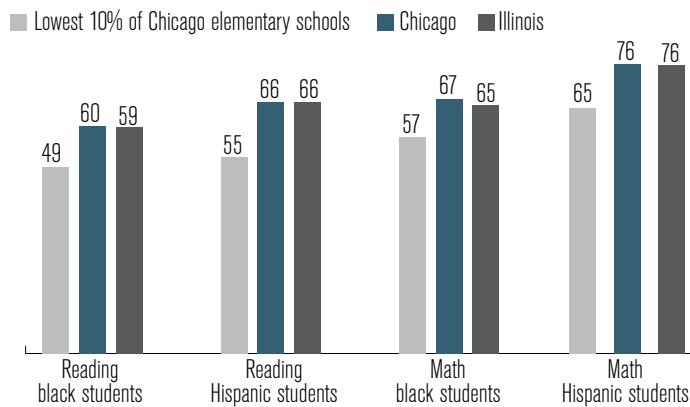
In Chicago, two-thirds of students made AYP in reading and almost three-quarters made AYP in math. Black students and Hispanic students performed an average of 10 percentage points lower in both subjects.²⁷

Only half of all students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools made AYP in reading and slightly more than half made AYP in math.²⁸

A look at the different racial subgroups illustrates just how poorly these schools are educating minority students. Fewer than half of black students and slightly more than half of Hispanic students met standards in reading. In math, the percentages are slightly better, but not by much.²⁹

Black and Hispanic students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools struggle to keep up with their peers statewide

Percent of students who made adequate yearly progress (AYP)



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

These numbers reflect the percentage of students who met standards or improved their state exam scores across the state, within CPS and the lowest-performing elementary schools in the district. They do not, however, indicate which schools made AYP.

Even given the state's lax standards, none of Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools made AYP last year. This is actually true of Chicago as well. Across the state, only 18 percent of districts and 34 percent of schools made AYP.³⁰

Chronic truancy

Missing a significant amount of school can have a negative impact on a student's educational life. An analysis of 2009 Chicago Public School ISAT scores of chronically truant students showed that they are 10 to 30 percent more likely than their peers to fail at least one of the four subject matter tests.³¹

Chronic truants are students who have been absent from school without valid cause for 5 percent or more of the 180 regular school days. Before 2011, the state only considered students chronically truant if they missed 10 percent or more regular school days.³²

In addition, chronically truant students often suffer serious and severe academic deficits because of their time out of school, which result in poor future employment opportunities, lower status jobs, less stable careers, high unemployment and lower earnings as adults.³³

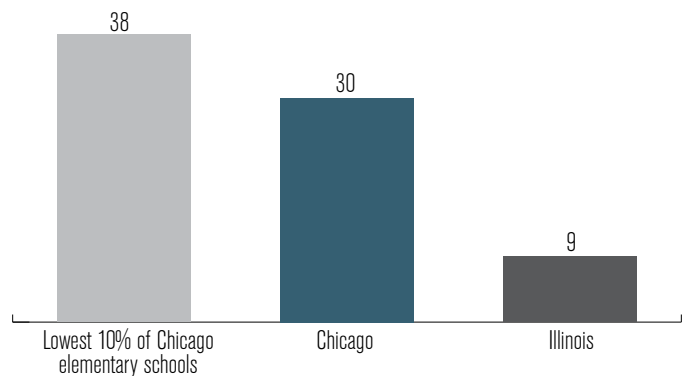
A 2010 Chicago Tribune article on chronic absenteeism in Chicago Public Schools revealed that more than 32,000 K-8 students – or about 1 in 8 – missed a month or more of the 2010-2011 school year.³⁴

Statewide, only a handful of students were chronically truant in 2012.³⁵ In Chicago, the percentage was much higher.³⁶

This pales in comparison, though, to the truancy rates of students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools. There, students are more than four times as likely to be truant compared to their peers across the state.³⁷ At the city's lowest-performing elementary school, Dewey Elementary Academy of Fine Arts, nearly 78 percent of students are chronically truant.³⁸

Students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are more than four times as likely to be truant as other Illinois students

Percent of students who were chronically truant



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

Why are so many students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools truant?

Some of the blame can be placed at the feet of irresponsible parents or individual economic situations that necessitate students working or taking care of their siblings. Some students, however, choose to miss school because don't see the value in attending.

Chicago Public Schools has taken some steps to address this issue. If a child doesn't arrive by 9:30 a.m., schools initiate computerized robocalls to contact the family, followed by mailings after the fifth and ninth excused absence. Trained mentors also make weekly hour-long visits and calls aimed at 450 at-risk first through seventh graders under a pilot program using federal and private foundation funds.³⁹

Recent figures, however, show that more work needs to be done.⁴⁰ Simply funneling money into schools and programs to alleviate the problem is not enough.

Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools are failing students

Children at the 42 poorest-performing schools routinely score below their peers city and state-wide on the ISAT. None of the schools in the list made AYP even after the state made changes to the criteria to make it much easier to meet the standard. More than one-third of students are chronically absent.

These statistics are startling. They also don't bode well for the future.

The poor-quality of education that students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools currently receive leaves lasting scars that follow them well into high school – if the students decide to pursue their education that far.

A student who fails to meet standards on the ISAT is almost guaranteed to not meet standards on the PSAE and ACT. This, in turn, makes it very likely that the same student will not be qualified enough to be accepted at any college. This means that they will face the same future that many high school dropouts and high school graduates are already experiencing – a life of minimum wage jobs and chronic unemployment, or worse.

The lowest-performing high schools in Chicago

At a recent event honoring black male graduates of Chicago's public high schools, Lupe Fiasco – world-famous rapper and former Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, student – told the teenage audience what he really thinks about the education they received:

“Congratulations, you have just graduated from one of the most terrible, substandard school systems in the entire world [...] you have just spent the last 12 years receiving one of the lowest-performing educations on Earth. You are at least four, five steps behind people in other countries that are younger than you.”

While this is not true of all Chicago high schools, especially its high-performing selective and charter schools, it is true for the lowest 10 percent of high schools in the city.

Take Fenger High School, for example. Only 3.4 percent of its juniors are performing at grade level in math, science and reading.⁴² Its graduation rate is lower than its dropout rate.⁴³ It has been ranked by CPS as a low-performing school for 16 years straight.⁴⁴

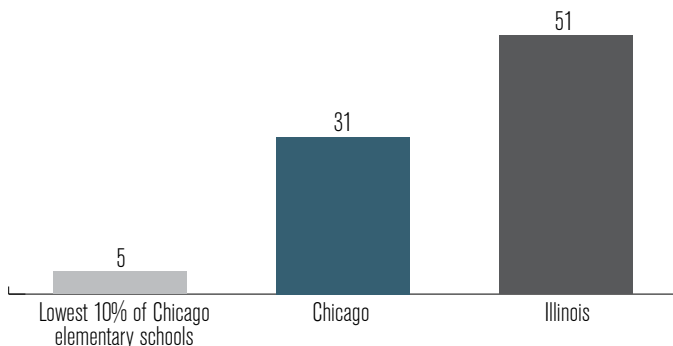
Unfortunately, the other seven schools that make up the lowest 10 percent of high schools aren't much different from Fenger. They, too, have dismally low test results, high dropout rates and school environments that are not conducive to learning.

State standards

Schools across Illinois have struggled with ensuring that students are ready for college. In fact, barely half of Illinois students received good enough scores on the PSAE to meet or exceed state standards in 2012.⁴⁵ Less than a third of Chicago students met this same benchmark.⁴⁶ This statistic is high, however, compared to Chicago's lowest-performing high schools. There, only a small percentage of students met or exceeded state standards on the PSAE.⁴⁷

A small percentage of students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools meet state standards

Percent of students who met/exceeded standards on the PSAE



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

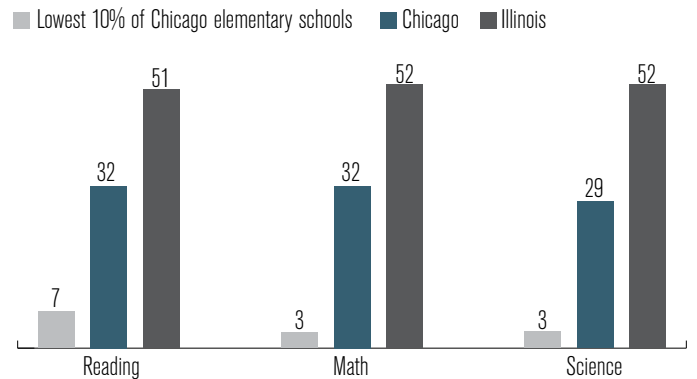
To meet standards on the PSAE, a high school junior needs to be performing at grade level.

In reading, this means that they “demonstrate a general understanding of important ideas in a text [...] and can understand theme and the author’s purpose.”⁴⁸ In math, students who meet standards demonstrate a “proficient command of algebra, geometry, probability, statistics and data analysis.”⁴⁹ In science, they can formulate acceptable hypotheses, and have a basic understanding of life, earth and physical sciences.⁵⁰

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools had the most difficult time meeting standards in science. In fact, only 3 percent of them were able to. In math, the number was the same. Only in reading did they perform slightly better.⁵¹

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools struggle to meet state standards in reading, math and science

Percent of students who met/exceeded standards on the PSAE



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

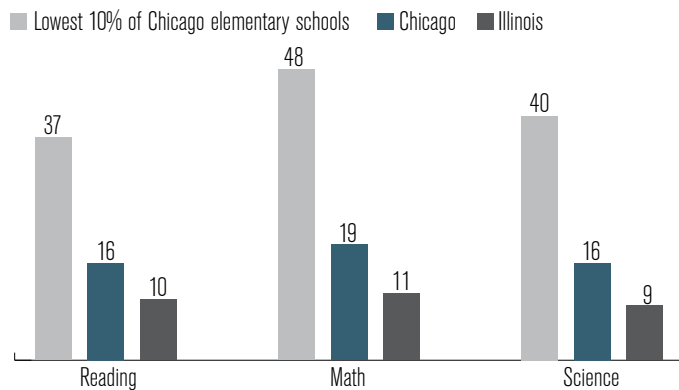
In Chicago, almost two-thirds met or exceeded state standards in science, math and reading. Statewide, little more than half of students met these benchmarks in all subject areas.⁵²

A look at the percentage of students who scored significantly below standards shows just how much Chicago's lowest-performing high schools are failing their students.

Students who score in the lowest category – “warning” – on the PSAE in reading “demonstrate limited knowledge and skills [...] and can recognize a few basic literary elements, such as setting, conflict and plot.”⁵³ In math, these same students “have difficulty completing one-step percentage problems, and have limited knowledge of algebra and geometry.”⁵⁴ In science, they have difficulty trying to formulate simple hypotheses and lack a basic knowledge of life, earth and physical sciences.⁵⁵

Almost half of all students in Chicago's lowest-performing high schools are performing significantly behind grade level in math

Percent of students who scored in the "warning" category on the PSAT



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

Chicago's lowest-performing high schools have nearly four times the percentage of students scoring well below state standards as the state.⁵⁶

Federal standards

Like Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools, Chicago's lowest-performing high schools are also evaluated using federal standards established under No Child Left Behind, or NCLB.

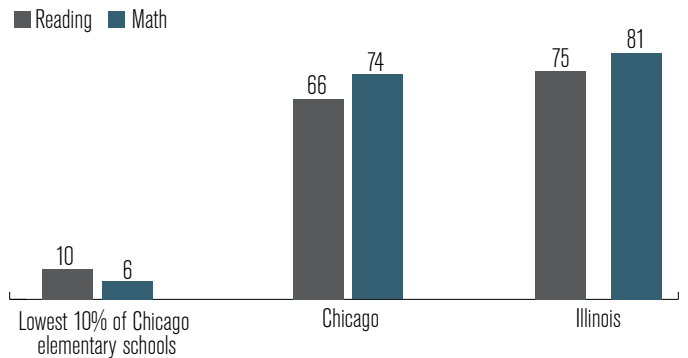
Under NCLB, the state has some leeway in how it determines whether a district, school or student has made AYP.

Unfortunately, over the past couple of years, the Illinois State Board of Education, or ISBE, has significantly lowered the bar on what it takes to make adequate yearly progress, or AYP. Essentially, districts, schools and students make AYP if they meet state standards or if test scores improve, rather than based on whether they meet certain student performance targets set by the state.

Even given these lax standards, nearly one-quarter of Illinois high school students failed to improve their scores in math and reading on state exams.

Less than 10 percent of students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools meet federal standards in reading and math

Percent of students who made adequate yearly progress (AYP)



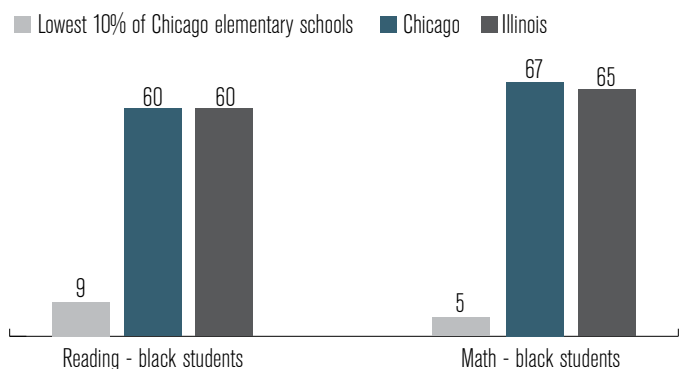
Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

In Illinois, nearly two-thirds of black students met reading and math targets, respectively. For Hispanic students, the numbers were slightly better.⁵⁷

In Chicago, the percentages were very similar, with two-thirds of students meeting standards for reading and almost three-quarters making AYP in math. Black students and Hispanic students were even lower, with approximately two-thirds percent of black students making AYP in both subjects and two-thirds to three-quarters of Hispanic students performing similarly.⁵⁸

Black students in Chicago's lowest-performing high schools fall dramatically short of federal education benchmarks

Percent of students who made adequate yearly progress (AYP)



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

But this is nothing compared to the performance of students in Chicago's lowest-performing high schools. There, less than 10 percent of black students made AYP in reading and math.⁵⁹

Graduation and dropout rates

In June 2013, when the state released new data that showed a slight increase in Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, graduation rates, from 61 percent to 63 percent, both the district and the Chicago Teachers Union, or CTU, issued public statements that were verbal pats on the back:

From the CTU:

“We are happy to see increased graduation rates for CPS. It proves those diatribes against teachers and the labeling of our public schools as failing is not only mean-spirited but inaccurate. We only wish that CPS had applied the same approach to the scores of schools they just closed.”⁶⁰

From CPS:

“This graduation rate is a testament to our hard-working students, educators and administrators, but we know there is more to do. With a full school day, a full day of kindergarten, a rigorous curriculum tied to Common Core standards and increasing STEM and IB programs, and working with parents and our communities, we will keep this momentum going on behalf of every child in every neighborhood across the city.”⁶¹

What both the CTU and CPS failed to explain in their press releases, however, is what the increase in the graduation rate actually signifies.

At a bare minimum, it means that more CPS high school students were able to complete CPS's high school graduation requirements in 2012.

Unfortunately, these requirements are not rigorous. In fact, students can fail one of four core classes (English, math, science and social sciences) each year and still advance to the next grade level. They also only have to garner just a “D” in each class they take to earn the 24 credit hours they need to graduate.⁶²

It's important to remember what a graduation rate doesn't tell us – namely, how prepared the graduating students are for college.

According to a recent report, 45 percent of CPS graduates begin their senior year not doing well enough academically to attend a four-year college. In the fall after graduation, the most common outcome for these students was to be neither working nor in school.⁶³

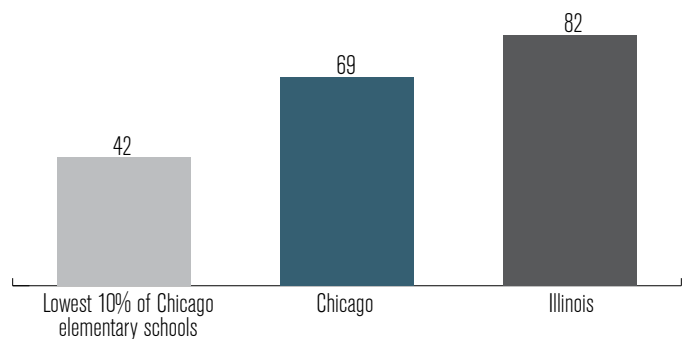
Even those who go to college struggle to succeed. From the fall 2009 semester, of the more than 2,800 CPS high school graduates attending City Colleges of Chicago, 71 percent needed remedial reading, 81 percent needed remedial English and 94 percent needed remedial math. Overall, 40 percent of this group took two remedial courses, an additional 21 percent took three remedial courses and 10 percent took four remedial courses.⁶⁴

But the graduation rate is still an important statistic to measure because it provides a glimpse at which students met state requirements to complete high school.

In Illinois, more than four-fifths of students who were freshman five years ago graduated from high school this year.⁶⁵ Chicago's graduation rate is almost 15 points lower.⁶⁶ The graduation rate at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools is far worse. There, less than half of students graduate.⁶⁷

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools graduate at nearly half the state rate

Percent of entering freshman who graduated in five years



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

Another important statistic to examine is a high school's dropout rate.

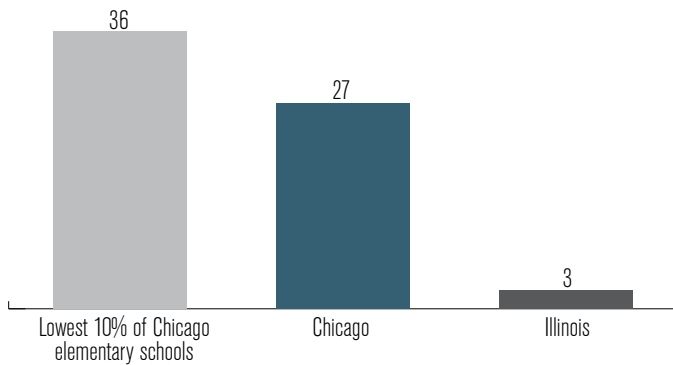
The economic value that comes with earning at least a high school diploma is large. According to the 2009 U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, adults ages 25 and older who dropped out of high school or had not earned a GED earned up to 41 percent less than those who had. The gap widened when comparing the incomes of high school dropouts to individuals with bachelor's degrees. In 2009, male and female college graduates earned \$58,000 and \$39,000 respectively, while male and female high school dropouts earned \$21,629 and \$13,943, respectively.⁶⁸

Illinois' dropout rate is low. This is primarily due to the fact that when the state calculates the statistic, it only looks at the number of students who stopped attending school that year. It does not follow the same group of students across all of their years in school. The dropout rates for Chicago and Chicago's lowest-performing high schools measure the percentage of students from the class of 2007 who dropped out of school by 2012.

Even given this statistical quirk, the dropout rate at the lowest-performing high schools in Chicago is nearly 40 percent.⁶⁹

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools drop out at nearly 12 times the rate of state students

Percent of students who dropout annually



Source: Chicago Public Schools Office of Strategy, Research and Accountability; Illinois Interactive Report Card

Some blame can be placed on the rise of gangs in Chicago's inner city and the fast cash that can be made in the drug trade.⁷⁰ But a significant amount of blame should be placed at feet of all of the players in the Chicago Public School System. They have consistently advocated for the status quo despite the fact that it is failing Chicago's high school students – especially those at the city's lowest-performing schools.

Chicago's lowest-performing high schools are failing students

Chicago's lowest-performing high schools are failing to provide even the most basic education for their students. The fact that more than one-third of juniors at these schools aren't even able to complete simple algebraic equations or analyze basic reading passages is proof of this.

This is the sad state of affairs at Chicago's lowest-performing high schools. Instead of uplifting students, these schools fail to prepare them for the future.

Receiving a poor education can leave lasting scars. This is especially true for students in early grades. The statistics don't lie – students who are in the warning category for Illinois Standard Achievement Test, or ISAT, have a nearly zero chance of attending college.

Falling behind in elementary school has a devastating impact on a student's success in high school and beyond. A student who is significantly behind his or her peers in elementary school is more likely to drop-out of high school.

The poor-performance of Chicago's lowest-performing high schools just compounds the problem. Not only are its students coming from some of the lowest-performing elementary schools in the city, they are not receiving the extra care and attention they need to be successful in secondary school.

Many are simply allowed to slip through the cracks and enter the real world with a limited skill set.

That's why it's so important that immediate action is taken to allow these students to take advantage of different educational options that will make staying in school an easier choice to make.

The solution

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools need an escape route – fast. They do not have the luxury of waiting to see if minor changes in policy will make a difference in their lives.

Politicians need to allow students attending these schools to take advantage of variety of educational options that students in other states already enjoy. This means lifting the charter school cap, creating an environment where online and blended learning can thrive, and supporting choice programs – such as vouchers, tax-credit scholarships and education-savings accounts – that allow students in Chicago's lowest-performing-performing elementary schools and high schools to attend schools that better fit their learning styles and are more responsive to their needs.

When it comes to instituting these reforms, Illinois doesn't need to start from scratch. Alternatives already exist and have proven effective in other states across the country, including Wisconsin and Indiana.

Surely, most Illinois legislators would not allow their children to attend the schools described in this report. Forcing other people to send their students to these schools is wrong, too.

Students at Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools need immediate relief from the poor educational environments they are currently stuck in.

Why it works

Providing students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary schools and high schools with more educational options will not only benefit students in the near term, but it will also force public schools to improve or risk losing students.

In fact, studies from other states have shown that the presence of charter schools and the existence of school choice programs increases test scores of students remaining in public schools.⁷¹

The main goal of any reforms should be to allow students in Chicago's lowest-performing elementary and high schools to

leave their schools immediately. They need to be given the opportunity to learn and become successful.

Legislators have failed to do their job of ensuring that Illinois' education system is having a positive effect on students, especially those who need the most help.

It is time to take the power out of their hands and put it back into the hands of parents and students – where it should have been all along.

APPENDIX

The lowest-performing elementary schools in Chicago

School Name	Student enrollment	ISAT % meet or exceed				ISAT % Warn				Annual Yearly Progress - % meet or exceed						
		Reading	Math	Science	Composite	Reading	Math	Science	Composite	Reading - All	Math - All	Reading - Black	Math - Black	Reading - Hispanic	Math - Hispanic	Truancy rate (%)
ALDRIDGE	284	24.7	19.2	52	27.1	12.1	21.4	12	15.9	59.1	57.8	59.1	57.8			35.8
BARTON	590	27.7	26	47.9	29.5	17	16.5	13.7	16.4	58.8	66.9	59	66.8			22.7
BOND	308	26.2	22.6	50	27.7	16.7	17.3	8	15.8	59.4	65.4	59.8	65.2			18.8
BRIGHT	340	29.6	22.7	47.5	28.7	17.6	21.3	13.6	18.7	57.1	66.1	55.3	64.4	62.3	71.7	15.5
CARVER , G	542	27.7	25.2	48.1	29.5	16.5	18.4	21.2	18	57.3	65	57.3	65			50.4
CATALYST CHTR - HOWLAND	507	30.5	21	38.8	27.9	15.1	22.3	21.6	19	53.9	57.6	53.9	58.1			56.4
CHALMERS	283	25.7	15	59.2	25.3	19.8	29.3	14.3	23.2	48.8	52.1	49.2	52.5			9.9
CIGS - HAWKINS	348	28.9	17.8	31.7	24.9	13.3	17.8	30.2	18.3							
DEWEY	358	12.3	19.2	36.1	18.8	35.1	24.4	24.6	29	36.6	55.6	36.6	53.6			77.9
DOOLITTLE	310	17.2	13.8	45.3	20.1	19.5	27	21.9	23.1	42.8	54.7	43	56			51.7
DUBOIS	186	22	25.4	38.5	25.8	10.2	13.6	5.1	10.9	55.6	67.7	51.1	65.9			18.8
DVORAK TECH ACAD	561	28.3	20.3	51.9	28.2	18.1	28.8	10.6	21.6	53.1	53.3	53.4	54.3			34.9
EARLE	336	23	25	50	27.8	21.1	18	7.1	17.7	58.3	68.9	58.3	68.9			12.2
FAIRFIELD	602	21.4	19.1	37.6	22.8	27.6	28.4	27.8	28	44.4	52.8	46.6	42.4	43.8	62.1	5.2
FULLER	245	17.2	10.3	47.5	17.9	28.3	36.6	15	30.3	40	34	40.4	33.3			46.8
FULTON	480	18	32.7	53.2	29.1	22	19.9	22.1	21.1	99.6	46	39.9	70.6	66.7	82.2	28.7
HAMMOND	449	19	19.7	50.6	23.7	22.8	26.5	9.1	22.5	42.8	56.3			43.3	56.2	25.2
HEARST	340	18.2	20.9	48.7	22.8	25.2	32.3	23.1	28.1	39.4	45.7	37.8	43.9			32.1
HENDERSON	407	23.9	24.8	47.9	27.5	19.1	22.2	21.1	20.7	49.4	58.1	49.2	57.9			24.8
HENDRICKS	304	22	29.4	45.6	28.5	20.9	19.2	15.8	19.5	52.5	67.4	51.5	66.4			46.3
HERZL	492	16.3	10.4	34.8	16.2	23.5	35.3	27.5	29.2	46.8	48.5	45.9	47.7			53.8
HOLMES	340	15.3	23.4	39.2	22.3	31.6	30.4	18.9	29.2	39.1	56.7	39.5	56.3			44.8
JACKSON, M	317	29.6	19.4	45.8	27.3	23.3	29.8	20.3	25.7	61.2	58.1	61.6	58.5			35
JENNER	312	24	26.2	57.1	29.8	27.9	25.7	3.2	23.3	43	64.8	43.3	64.6			55.2
LAWNDALE	506	24.5	22.8	47.3	26.9	21.4	26.2	22.6	23.6	49	61.4	48.5	61.1			21.8
LEWIS	575	23.1	14.2	41.7	22.1	24	30.8	31.7	28	52.9	48.5	52.9	46			24.5
LIBBY	523	17.5	21	46.2	23.1	23.9	24.5	15.1	22.9	44.5	63	43.8	62.6			49.2
MANIERRE	396	24.7	25.4	42	27	20.5	22.8	20	21.4	52.8	59.9	53.4	60			75.4
MANN	480	24.1	19.6	50.5	25.9	14.1	25.1	21.1	19.8	53.8	58.5	53.8	58.5			38.9
MARQUETTE	1395	23.5	20.4	45.9	25.1	21.2	27.4	17.9	23.4	52.5	57.5	50.9	50.2	52.7	62.5	34.2
MIRELES	906	25.4	23.6	43.9	27.5	23.5	26.5	24.7	24.9	48.4	57.9	53	54.3	44.3	60.4	33.3
SULLIVAN	505	25	20.4	57.3	27.6	17.7	17.8	10.7	16.8	58.6	61.2	54.9	58.3	66.2	66.2	36.3
O'KEEFFE	574	24.5	15.7	60.5	24.8	18.7	27.2	15.1	22	51.2	51.4	51.2	51.4			45.1
PARKER	801	28	23.1	53.4	29.2	16.5	22.2	9.8	18.1	57.2	59.9	57.5	58.9			40.2
PARKSIDE	353	17.3	19.9	35.9	21.1	21.9	27.6	25	24.8	46.5	59.4	46.4	60.3			50.8
PICCOLO	553	18	21.2	47.5	23.6	26.3	24.1	20.3	24.5	39.5	54.8	37.2	50.3	44.8	63.5	35.3
REVERE	322	28.2	17.4	50.7	26.8	12.7	19.2	9.6	15	58.9	62.1	58.9	62.1			38.1
ROBINSON	139	9.4	9.1	.	9.2	28.1	54.5	.	41.5	23.5	35.3					35.4
SCHMID	188	23.7	24	47.1	27.3	13.4	20.8	17.6	17.2	58.2	61.5	56.3	61.4			62.1
SMITH	366	25.6	22.7	51.6	27.8	18.7	17.2	17.7	17.9	51.2	66.1	51.6	66.3			54
STAGG	538	27.1	26.1	48	29.6	21.3	22.5	15.7	21	54.4	65	54.7	65.5			32.3
TILL	476	19.7	18.5	46.4	22.7	19.7	23.2	18.6	21.1	47.3	60.4	45.7	59.6			40
10% lowest average:		22.8	20.8	46.9	25.2	20.7	24.8	17.6	22.1	51.2	57.6	50.3	57.9	53.0	65.6	37.8

The lowest-performing high schools in Chicago

School Name	Student enrollment	PSAE % meet or exceed			PSAE % warning				Annual Yearly Progress - % meet or exceed				Dropout rate (%)	Graduation rate (%)
		Reading	Math	Science	Reading	Math	Science	Composite	Reading - All	Math - All	Reading - black	Math -black		
FENGER HS	775	6.2	2.8	1.4	29.7	50.3	38.6	39.5	10	4.6	10.2	4.7	52	45.1
HIRSCH HS	559	6.1	1	3	41.4	48.5	39.4	43.1	6.7	4.4	6.7	4.5	46.8	45.8
PHILLIPS HS	647	7.9	1	3	33.7	48	37.6	39.8	9.3	3.4	9.5	3.5	52.1	40.3
TILDEN HS	556	5.1	2.5	4.2	50.8	50.8	42.4	48	7.4	4.9	2.2	2.2	61.9	33.9
CRANE HS	524	8	3.4	3.4	36.4	46.6	37.5	40.2	11.4	5.7	10.5	5.8	54.9	39.7
FORD CHTR HS	454	11.4	2.9	1.4	34.3	50	42.9	42.4	10.6	3	10.6	3	1.1	--
ORR HS	1041	4.9	5.6	6.3	31	38	38	35.7	13.8	11.5	14.3	11.4	17	41.4
ROBESON HS	833	8	5.3	3.3	36	50.7	44.7	43.8	8.5	6.9	8.5	7	6	49.3
10% lowest average:		7.2	3.1	3.3	36.7	47.9	40.1	41.6	9.7	5.6	9.1	5.3	36.5	42.2

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?schoold=150162990252159>
- ² Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?source>About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment&schoold=150162990252159&level=S
- ³ See Appendix
- ⁴ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source>About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment&districtID=15016299025&level=D
- ⁵ Illinois State Board of Education, School Incident Reporting System, <http://webapps.isbe.net/sirs/webreports.aspx>
- ⁶ Larry Gavin, "ISBE low-balls new ISAT cut scores, misalignment with PSAE and ACT college-readiness continues," Evanston Roundtable, Feb. 27, 2013, <http://evanstonroundtable.com/main.asp?SectionID=16&subsectionID=27&articleID=6828>
- ⁷ Illinois State Board of Education, Student Assessment: Performance and Definitions, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/per_def.htm
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ See Appendix.
- ¹¹ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/School.aspx?source=Profile&schoold=150162990252159&level=S>
- ¹² Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source>About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment&districtID=15016299025&level=D
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Illinois State Board of Education, "Illinois Standard Achievement Test: 2012 Technical Manual," http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/isat_tech_2012.pdf
- ¹⁵ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source=ISAT&source2=ISATResults&districtID=15016299025&level=D>
- ¹⁶ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>
- ¹⁷ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/State.aspx?source=ISAT&source2=ISATResults>
- ¹⁸ Illinois State Board of Education, ISAT Reading Performance Definitions – Grade 8, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/reading_isat_perfdef_g8.htm
- ¹⁹ Illinois State Board of Education, ISAT Math Performance Definitions – Grade 8, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/pdfs/Gr8_Math_Perf_Def.pdf
- ²⁰ National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping/>
- ²¹ John Q. Easton, Stephen Ponisciak and Stuart Lupescu, "From high school to the future: the pathway to 20," <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Pathway%20to%2020%20Report-final.pdf>
- ²² Larry Gavin, "ISBE low-balls new ISAT cut scores, misalignment with PSAE and ACT college-readiness continues," Feb. 27, 2013, <http://evanstonroundtable.com/main.asp?SectionID=16&subsectionID=27&articleID=6828>
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Diane Rado, "State fudges the rules for rating schools," Chicago Tribune, Sept. 17, 2013, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/education/ct-met-illinois-test-scores-schools-20130917,0,1601665.story>
- ²⁵ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/State.aspx?source=AYP_Information&source2=AYP_Report
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

ENDNOTES

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Illinois State Board of Education, "More Illinois schools identified for improvement under No Child Left Behind benchmarks," Oct. 20, 2012, <http://www.isbe.state.il.us/news/2012/oct30.htm>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Tonisha Jones and Nicholas Lovrich, "Updated Literature Review on Truancy," Center for Children and Youth Justice, <http://www.ccyj.org/uploads/PPO/WSU%20Literature%20Review.pdf>

³⁴ David Jackson and Gray Marx, "CPS commissioned, then abandoned anti-truancy plan," Chicago Tribune, Dec. 24, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-12-24/news/ct-met-truancy-report-20121224_1_anti-truancy-plan-truancy-and-absenteeism-attendance-data

³⁵ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/State.aspx?source=About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment

³⁶ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source=About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment&districtID=15016299025&level=D

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ David Jackson and Gray Marx, "CPS commissioned, then abandoned anti-truancy plan," Chicago Tribune, Dec. 24, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-12-24/news/ct-met-truancy-report-20121224_1_anti-truancy-plan-truancy-and-absenteeism-attendance-data

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Melia Robinson, "Lupe Fiasco obliterates Chicago Public Schools in speech to grads," Business Insider, July, 2, 2013, <http://www.businessinsider.com/lupe-fiasco-high-school-grad-speech-chicago-2013-7>

⁴² Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/State.aspx?source=Profile>

⁴⁶ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source=Profile&districtID=15016299025&level=D>

⁴⁷ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

⁴⁸ Illinois State Board of Education, Student Assessment – PSAE Reading Performance Definitions, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/reading_psaef_perfdef.htm#meets

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, <http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source=PSAE&source2=PSAEResults&districtID=15016299025&level=D>

⁵³ Illinois State Board of Education, Student Assessment – PSAE Reading Performance Definitions, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/reading_psaef_perfdef.htm

⁵⁴ Illinois State Board of Education, Student Assessment – PSAE Math Performance Definitions, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/math_psaef_perfdef.htm

⁵⁵ Illinois State Board of Education, Student Assessment – PSAE Science Performance Definitions, http://www.isbe.state.il.us/assessment/htmls/science_psaef_perfdef.htm#warning

ENDNOTES

⁵⁶ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source=AYP_Information&source2=AYP_Report&districtID=15016299025&level=D

⁵⁹ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

⁶⁰ Chicago Teachers Union, "CTU statement on increase in graduation rates," May 28, 2013, <http://www.ctunet.com/blog/ctu-statement-on-increase-in-graduation-rates>

⁶¹ Chicago Public Schools, "CPS students on track to set record graduation rate this school year," May 28, 2013, http://cps.edu/News/Press_releases/Pages/PR1_05_28_2013.aspx

⁶² Chicago Public Schools, Minimum High School Graduation Requirements, <http://policy.cps.k12.il.us/documents/605.3.pdf>

⁶³ Melissa Roderick, Vanessa Coca, Eliza Moeller and Thomas Kelley-Kemple, "From high school to the future: the challenge of senior year in Chicago Public Schools," Feb. 2013, <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/Senior%20Year%20-%20Final.pdf>

⁶⁴ Kara Spak, "Report: Over a third of students entering college need remedial help," Chicago Sun Times, May 27, 2011, <http://www.suntimes.com/news/metro/5189336-418/college-can-be-a-rude-remedial-awakening.html>

⁶⁵ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/State.aspx?source>About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment

⁶⁶ Northern Illinois University, Illinois Interactive Report Card, http://iirc.niu.edu/District.aspx?source>About_Students&source2=Educational_Environment&districtID=15016299025&level=D

⁶⁷ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

⁶⁸ Education Week, Dropouts, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/dropouts/>

⁶⁹ Chicago Public Schools, School Data, <http://www.cps.edu/Schooldata/Pages/Schooldata.aspx>

⁷⁰ William N. Evans, Craig Garthwaite and Timothy J. Moore, "The white/black educational gap, stalled progress and the long term consequences of the emergence of the crack cocaine market," Sept. 2012, http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/garthwaite/html/Education_Crack.pdf

⁷¹ The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, Gold Standard Studies, <http://www.edchoice.org/Research/Gold-Standard-Studies.aspx>

Guarantee of quality scholarship

The Illinois Policy Institute is committed to delivering the highest quality and most reliable research on matters of public policy.

The Institute guarantees that all original factual data (including studies, viewpoints, reports, brochures and videos) are true and correct, and that information attributed to other sources is accurately represented.

The Institute encourages rigorous critique of its research. If the accuracy of any material fact or reference to an independent source is questioned and brought to the Institute's attention in writing with supporting evidence, the Institute will respond. If an error exists, it will be corrected in subsequent distributions. This constitutes the complete and final remedy under this guarantee.