

The State We're In: A Report on Public Education in Illinois

Advance Illinois



THE STATE WE'RE IN 2025

A REPORT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ILLINOIS



The State We're In

Advance Illinois biennially produces *The State We're In*, a quantitative analysis of the state of education in Illinois. We use publicly-available data sets to look at inputs, outputs and outcomes in our B-20 education systems.



The State We're In 2025 Advisory Group

Bethany Patten

*Chief Interagency Program Officer, Illinois
Department of Human Services*

Alicia Lynch-Deatherage

*Interim Director of Early Childhood Development,
Illinois State Board of Education*

Bryan Stokes

Director, McCormick Foundation

Dr. Kimako Patterson

Chief of Staff, Illinois State Board of Education

Hal Woods

Chief of Policy, Kids First Chicago

Jenny Nagaoka

*Deputy Director, University of Chicago
Consortium on School Research*

Dr. Meg Bates

*Director, Illinois Workforce and Education
Research Collaborative*

Dr. Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro

*Vice President of Education Policy & Research,
Latino Policy Forum*

Sarah Hartwick

*Senior Vice President and Corporate Board
Secretary, Illinois Manufacturers' Association*

Dr. Kyle Westbrook

Executive Director, EdSystems

Kris Monn

*Executive Director/CEO, Illinois Association of
School Business Officials*

Diana Zaleski

*Education Policy/Agency Relations Director,
Illinois Education Association*

Dr. Elizabeth Alvarez

*Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent Proviso
Township Schools*

Dave Ardrey

*Executive Director, The Association of Illinois
Rural and Small Schools*

Mike Abrahamson

*Director of Policy and Research, The Partnership
for College Completion*

Dr. Nidea Ruedas-Gracia

*Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology,
University of Illinois, College of Education*

Emily Klonicki

Executive Director, Alignment Rockford

Dr. Dana Weiner

*Chief Officer for the Children's Behavioral Health
Transformation, State of Illinois*

Dr. Kiljoong Kim

Policy Fellow, Chapin Hall

Dr. Mashana Smith

*Associate Director, School Mental Health, Center for
Childhood Resilience*

Breana Calloway

*Assistant Principal, EAC Member, North Chicago
District 187*

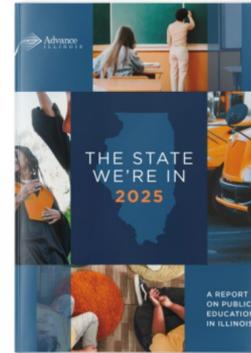
Michelle Zurita-Sharpe

Teacher, EAC Member, Chicago Public Schools

About *The State We're In Report 2025*

- Approximately 80 metrics grouped by education sector
- With a focus on current performance, longitudinal trends, and national context – paying close attention to how Illinois has recovered from the pandemic
- Equity gaps are of particular concern and are persistent throughout metrics
- In some instances, we specifically denote where data is not available to highlight that education stakeholders need this information to improve learning
- In some instances, we highlight datasets that have been delayed or are in danger of being discontinued by the federal government

Exploring **Enrollment and Access**,
Learning Conditions, and **Outcomes**
at every stop along the continuum of
Illinois' systems of education and care



ACCESS DIGITAL
REPORT
AND MORE



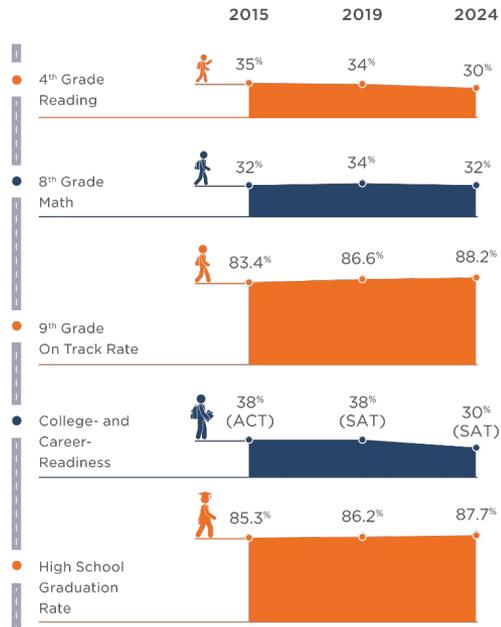
Progress Metrics

Kindergarten Readiness



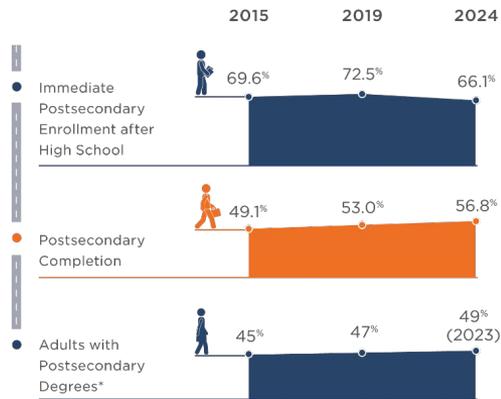
- **Progress in kindergarten readiness is a strong indicator for future success**
- **Kindergarten readiness has improved...**
- **...however, just a third of students exhibit readiness across developmental domains (language and literacy, math, social-emotional)**

K-12 Academic Progress and Persistence



- Illinois 4th and 8th grade NAEP proficiency held steadier than other states through the pandemic, but about a third of students are proficient
- High school persistence and completion is strong and improving
 - High 9th Grade On Track
 - High Graduation Rates
- College- and Career-Readiness as measured by the ACT and SAT has been dropping since 2015

Higher Education Enrollment and Attainment



See Footnotes for a full list of metric sources

- The percentage of students immediately enrolling in higher education fell during the pandemic and has not rebounded
- Completion rates are on the rise
- Overall attainment rates are increasing

A Note on Projections and the Importance of ILDS
Looking at sector-specific data allows us to understand how each sector is doing, but we also need to know how these systems interact.

State Rankings

Metrics Ranked in the Top Half of States

2 out
of 5

Early Childhood
and Education

10 out
of 16

K-12

20 out
of 28

Higher Education

- Illinois has narrowed equity gaps in many places across the education continuum
- However, all but one metric had equity gaps for:
 - Students of color,
 - Students from low-income households, or
 - English Learners

ILLINOIS' NATIONAL RANKINGS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE METRICS



2 out of 5 Early Childhood Education Metrics were in the top half of states

Early Childhood Education and Care

Enrollment and Access

- A record number of 3-year-olds are enrolled in state-funded preschool (3rd)
- Lower-ranking metrics:
 - Enrollment of 4-year-olds in state-funded preschools (20th)
 - Access to Head Start (29th)

Learning Conditions

- State preschool funding is middle-of-the-pack (26th)

Outcomes

- While we cannot compare Illinois to other states, kindergarten readiness has been improving, though gaps by income, race, language and learning style emerge early

ILLINOIS' NATIONAL RANKINGS ON K-12 METRICS



10 out of 16 K-12 Metrics were in the top half of states

K-12

Enrollment and Access*

Learning Conditions

- Illinois performs well on some indicators
 - per-student funding (18th)
 - student-to-teacher ratios in elementary grades (4th)
 - students taking AP exams (7th)
- With troubling performance on others
 - Chronic absenteeism remains high (20th)
 - Mental health indicators are of concern (bottom half for 2 of 3 metrics)

Outcomes

- Illinois 4th grade proficiency is in the bottom half of states
 - 4th grade NAEP reading and math proficiency (29th, 30th)
- But growth and 8th grade proficiency are some of the highest in the nation
 - State exam growth from 4th to 8th grade (3rd)
 - 8th grade NAEP reading and math proficiency (8th, 9th)

ILLINOIS' NATIONAL RANKINGS ON HIGHER EDUCATION METRICS



20 out of 28 Higher Education Metrics were in the top half of states

Higher Education

Enrollment and Access

- State spending on higher education is nearly last in the country
- Tuition and fees are among the highest in the nation
- However, net tuition beat national averages (20th)
 - Rising costs are combatted by institutional scholarships and state financial aid

Learning Conditions

- Illinois boasts strong retention
 - Community college retention is top 5 in the nation
 - Public 4-year university retention is middle-of-the-pack

Outcomes

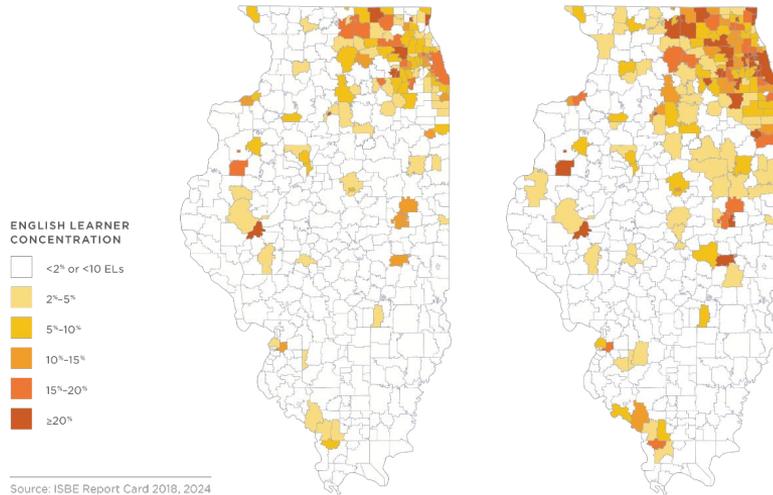
- Illinois consistently places in the top half of states for measures of completion and attainment



ILLINOIS B-20 LANDSCAPE

Population decreases impact the B-20 continuum

MAP OF THE PERCENTAGE OF PREK-12 ENGLISH LEARNERS IN 2018 AND 2024



Since 2010...

The statewide population has fallen

State population	1% decrease
Birthrates	11% decrease
Children under 5	13.7% decrease
School-age children	11.6% decrease
Young adults (15-19)	10.4% decrease

Enrollment has also decreased

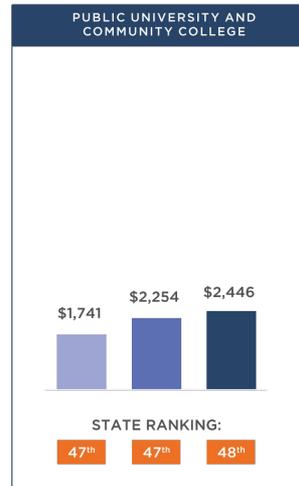
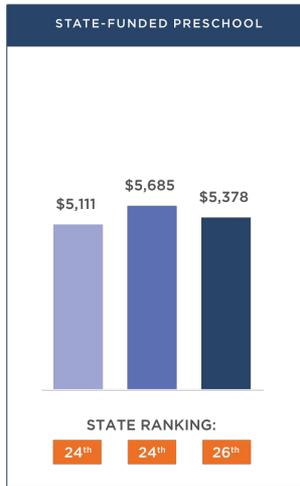
Public K-12	10.3% decrease (proportional)
Higher Education	28% decrease (outsized)

Enrollment in state-funded preschool has increased alongside declining Head Start enrollment

Diversity has risen in schools and colleges, with notable increases in Latinx students and English Learners

Despite efforts to increase funding across the continuum, spending is still inadequate and sometimes inequitable

ILLINOIS STATE FUNDING PER PUPIL (IN 2023 DOLLARS)



■ 2008
■ 2019
■ 2023

Source: (1) NIERR State of Preschool Yearbooks 2019, (2) U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Survey of School System Finances Tables, (3) National Center on Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education System

State-funded preschool

- Funding grew 21% from 2008 to 2024
- Remains middle of the pack nationally
- Gap to adequacy: \$8.9 billion*

Public university and community college

- Higher education appropriations dropped by 33%
 - After inflation-adjustment
- Trails the nation
- Gaps to adequacy:
 - Public Universities: \$1.4 billion*
 - Community Colleges: over \$700m

Sources: NIERR 2008-2023; NCES IPEDS 2008-2023

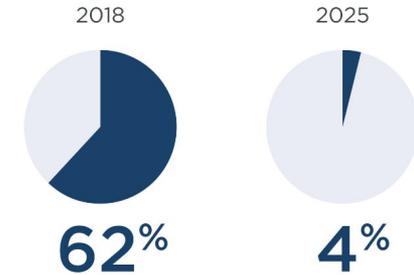
The Illinois Commission on Equitable Public University Funding released its recommendations in March 2024 and the Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding released its recommendations in Spring 2021 but neither set of recommendations have yet been fully implemented.

However, K-12 investment has increased Illinois' national ranking



K-12

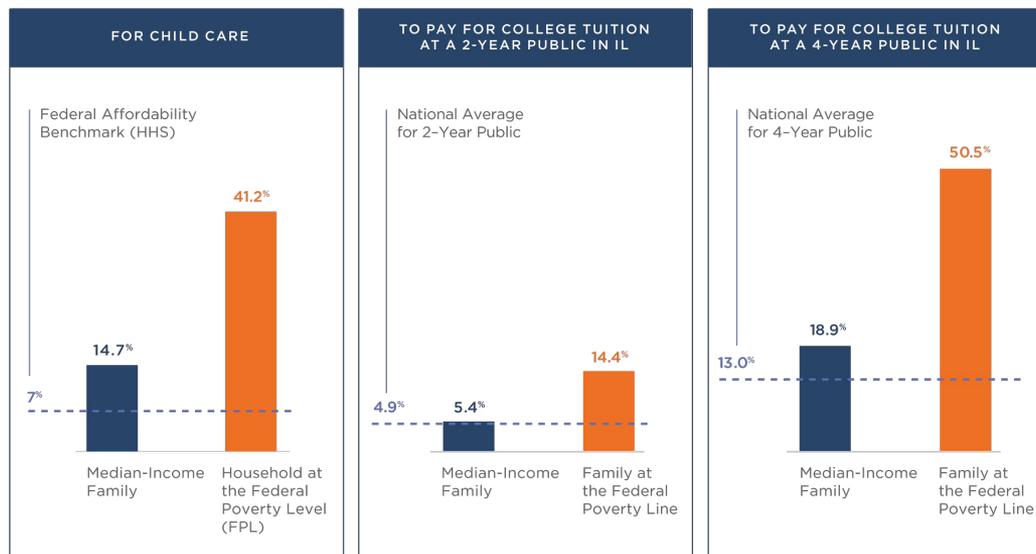
- Funding grew 75% from 2008 to 2024
- The percent of students in districts with <70% adequate funding has dropped



- Gap to adequacy in FY26: ~\$3 billion
- Plus nearly \$1B for mandated categoricals

Despite recent increases in funding, decades of disinvestment have resulted in overly high costs for students and families

PERCENT OF INCOME NEEDED:



- The cost of toddler care has increased from 2018 to 2022
 - Center-based: \$10.6k → \$11.4k
 - Home-based: \$6.6k → \$10.6k
- At 18.9%, the percent of the median family's income to pay for college tuition at a 4-year public institution is down from 23% in 2016
 - However, this still rests high above the national average

Already dire, student wellness in Illinois is worsening

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) framework

- 77% of Illinois youth have experienced an ACE
- Illinois youth experience 3+ ACEs at a rate lower than the national average
- Black students are over twice as likely to have reported 3+ ACEs than the statewide average

K-12 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System

- More students feel sad or hopeless
- More students consider suicide
- Increases are especially felt among female students

Mental Health in Higher Education

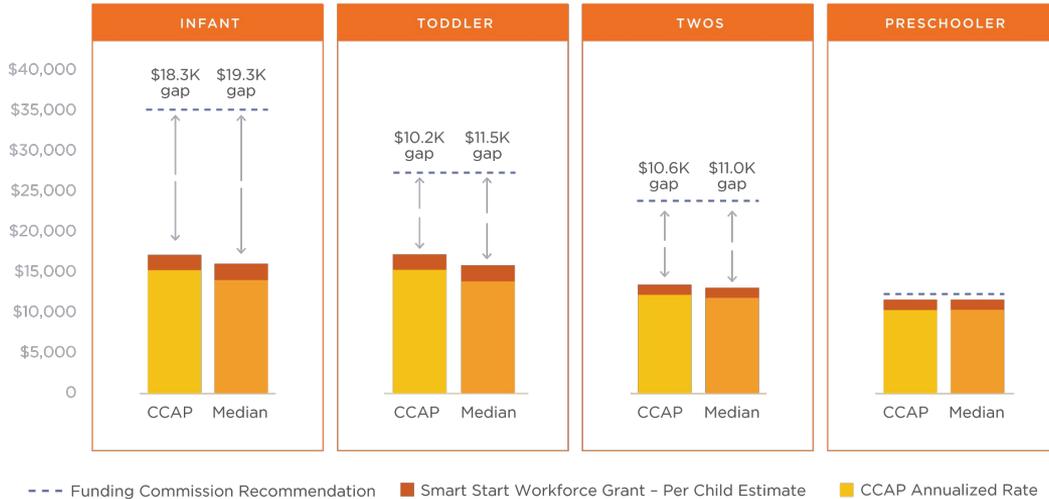
- Twice as many students felt that their mental health affected their academics compared to 2007
- Rates are higher among
 - Latinx students,
 - students with disabilities,
 - students with higher financial stress,
 - trans students,
 - students who identify as LGBTQ+



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Access to early childhood education and care is shifting and adapting, but costs remain prohibitive for both caregivers and parents

COMPARING CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCAP), PRIVATE PAY, AND THE TRUE COST OF CARE (IN 2024 DOLLARS).



- There is still work to do in ensuring that all eligible children have accessible and affordable options
 - only 21% of birth to 2-year-olds are being served
- Enrollment changes from 2019 to 2024
 - Preschool for All Expansion increased by 68%
 - Head Start decreased 41%
- Disinvestment has resulted in large gaps to adequacy for most age groups – pushing costs to families

Learning Conditions

EARNINGS BY EDUCATION LEVEL



Early childhood professionals are not well-compensated

- 69% of early childhood professionals hold an associate's degree or higher, but they earn less than the average Illinoisan at that education level
- Wage increases across all positions in licensed childcare centers have outpaced inflation but aren't rising fast enough

Vacancies are increasingly common and difficult to fill

- Turnover rates have been on the rise since 2021
- Administrators cite an average of 4 weeks to fill a vacant position

Fewer early childhood centers are participating in an accreditation process

- The number of children being served in a center with a Circle of Quality rating has decreased from nearly 80,000 in 2016 to 50,000 in 2023

Sources: IDHS, Illinois Salary & Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities, FY 2023; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), 2025; US Census, 2023; IECAM 2016, 2023

Figure created from metrics in text on page 20

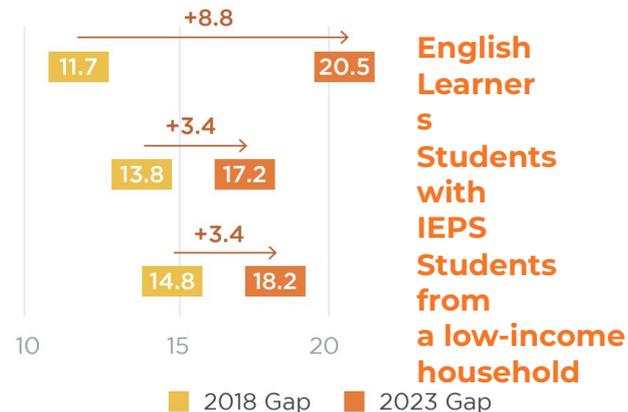
Early childhood outcomes are improving, but equity gaps are increasing

Overall Preparedness in Developmental Areas



Kindergarten Readiness, is an important predictor of later success, and it is improving

Percentage Point Gaps on Kindergarten Readiness in All 3 Areas



Gaps by race, income, language and learning style emerge early, and have widened

Note: Most English Learners were not given alternative language assessment items specifically for English Learners, so it is likely that English Learner kindergarten readiness levels are not systematically measured across all districts.



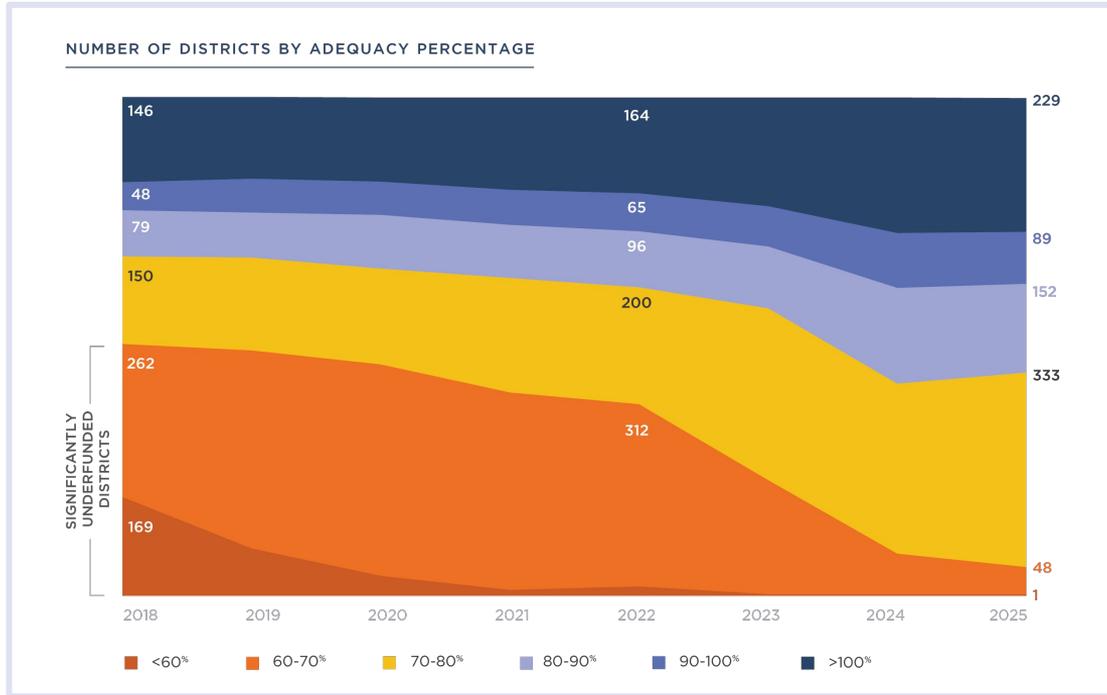
K-12 EDUCATION

The state is losing students in the K-12 system

- From 2010 to 2023...
 - the number of school-aged children decreased by 11.6%
 - enrollment in public K-12 schools decreased by 10.3%
- A growing number of students are neither enrolled in public schools nor a registered private school
 - That number hovers around 3-6% of students, up from 1% historically – trends that mirror national averages



There are fewer severely underfunded districts each year since the inception of EBF



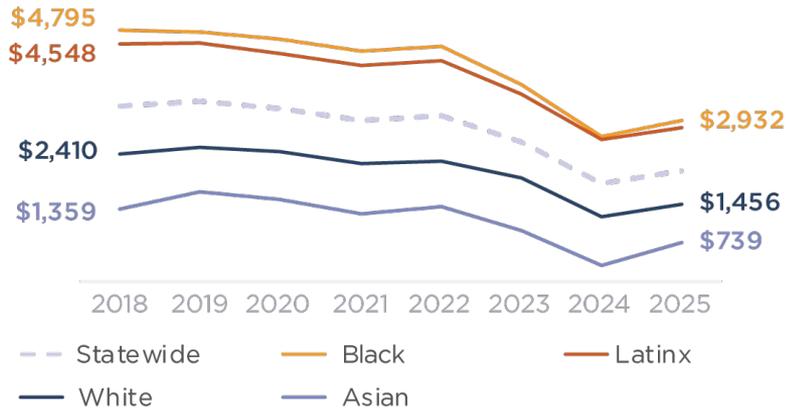
- The state has invested **roughly \$2.4 billion** in the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula
- The number of districts at less than 70% of adequacy has dropped from 431 in 2018 to 56 in 2026.
- The percent of students in districts below 70% of adequacy has declined nearly to zero across all student groups

Equity gaps in funding are closing, but they persist

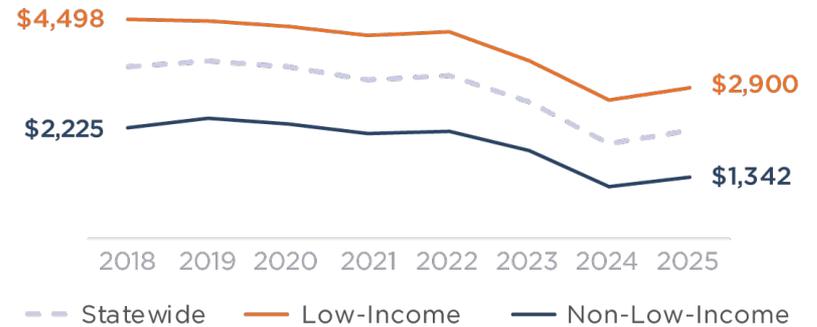
The largest gaps exist for Black and Latinx students, students from low-income households, and urban students

PER-PUPIL ADEQUACY GAP TO FULL FUNDING BY STUDENT GROUP AND LOCALE

BY RACE/ETHNICITY



BY INCOME STATUS

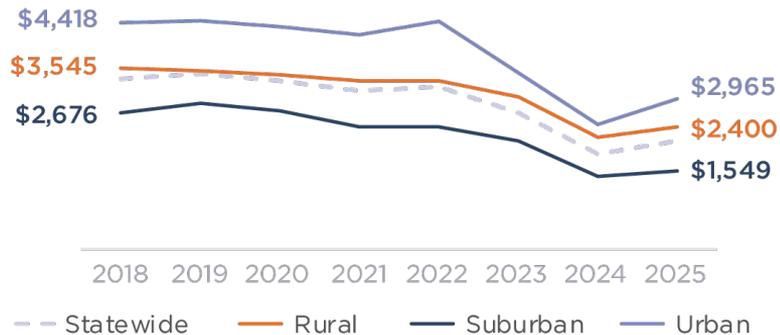


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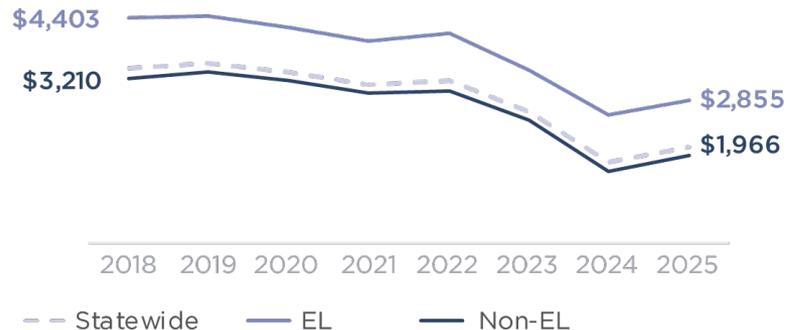
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PER-PUPIL ADEQUACY GAP TO FULL FUNDING BY STUDENT GROUP AND LOCALE

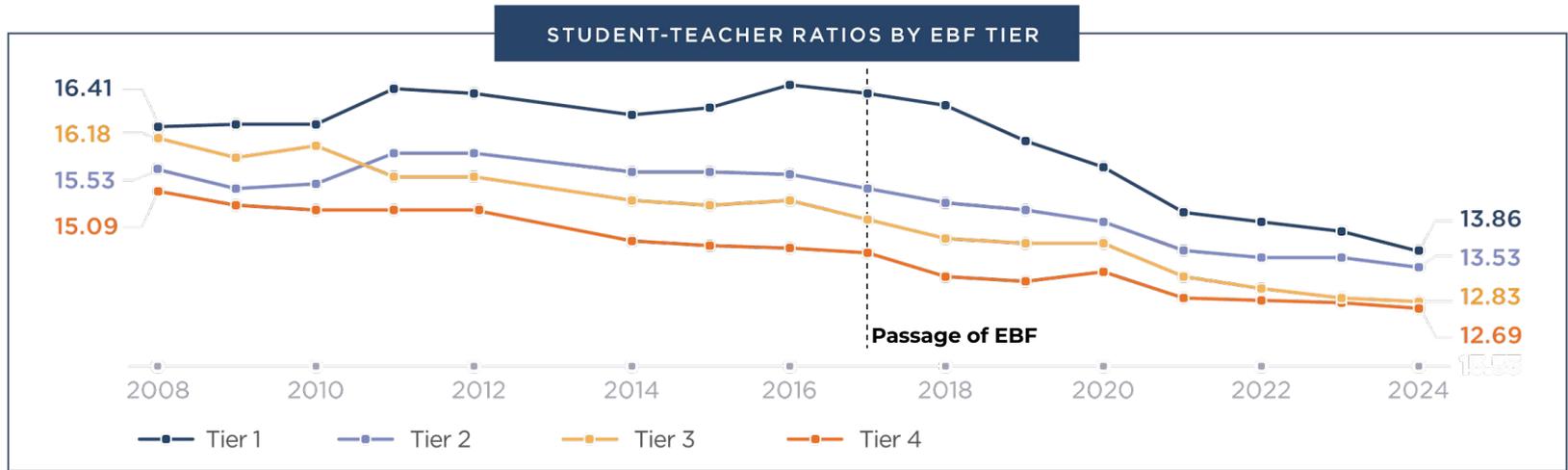
BY LOCALE



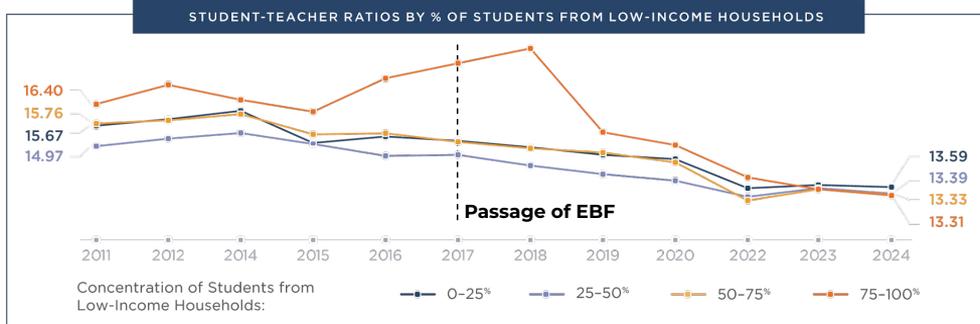
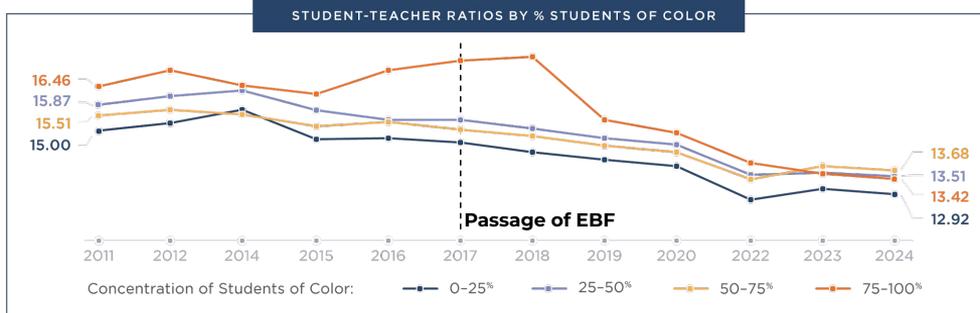
BY ENGLISH LEARNER STATUS



EBF has made a real difference in student-to-teacher ratios



Equity gaps in student-to-teacher ratios have closed significantly



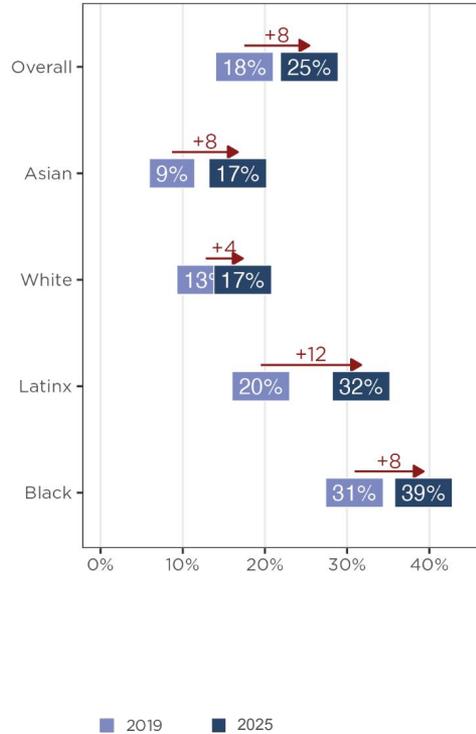
Improvements are a result of increased investment in teachers and statewide declines in enrollment

- Teacher FTE has increased by 6% since 2016
- Student enrollment has dropped by 9.3% since 2016

Despite increased diversity in teacher pipelines, educator diversity remains stubbornly low

- Educators of color make up only 18% of the workforce
- While students of color make up 54.7% of K-12 students

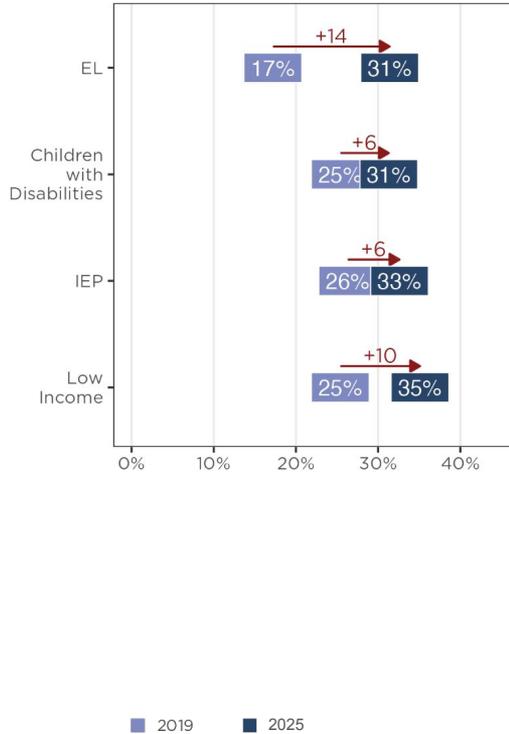
CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES
BY STUDENT GROUP



Student wellness trends, including chronic absenteeism, are at historic and worrisome levels

- **Chronic absenteeism is a powerful predictor of future success**
- **Chronic absenteeism has increased across all student groups**

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM RATES
BY STUDENT GROUP



Student wellness trends, including chronic absenteeism, are at historic and worrisome levels

- Chronic absenteeism is a powerful predictor of future success
- Chronic absenteeism has increased across all student groups

High-School mental health trends are worrisome

- 26% of students reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good
- The percentage of Illinois students feeling sad or hopeless increased from 27.8% in 2009 to 38.2% in 2023
 - Female students report feeling hopeless at a rate 28.1 percentage points higher than male students
- The percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide increased from 14.5% in 2009 to 19.2% in 2023.

Thanks to growing EBF funds, districts are hiring more student support personnel

- Illinois ranks 8th in the nation on rates of counseling and treatment of youth
- The ratio of SSPs to students improved from 2018 to 2024 across all roles, and continued to improve in 2025.
 - Nurses
 - School psychologists
 - School counselors
 - Social workers
 - Speech and language pathologists
- However, only school psychologists meet the student support personnel benchmarks and relevant experts
- Only 13% of students throughout the state attend school with a social worker or counselor
- Racial gaps in access to social workers and counselors



5 Essentials from 2018 to 2024

Effective Leaders

26.7% to 22.8%

Collaborative Teachers

33.7% to 19.2%

Involved Families

38.4% to 30.9%

Supportive Environment

35.4% to 30.8%

Ambitious Instruction

63.5% to 35.8%

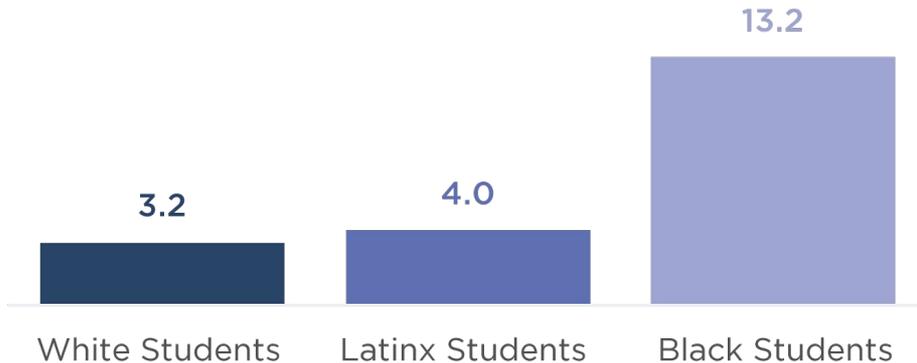
Culture and Climate

Since 2018...

- The percent of schools with strong or strongest implementation decreased across each of the essentials
- The percent of Illinois' schools strong in at least three essentials dropped from 29.4% to 20.2%.

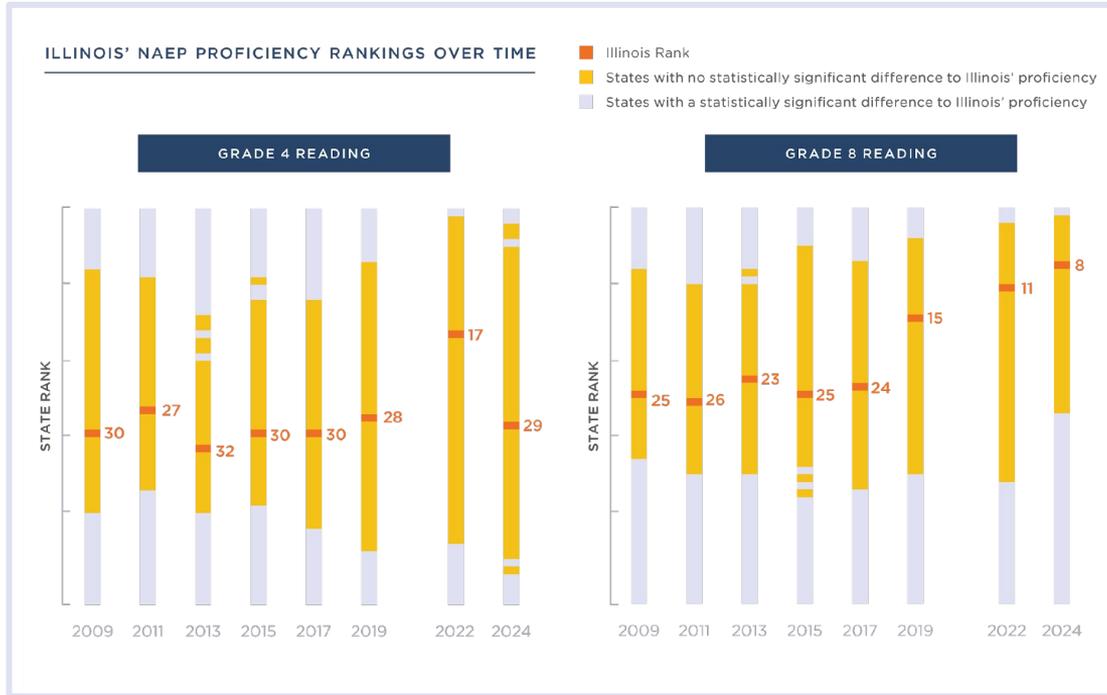
Student Discipline

SUSPENSIONS ISSUED PER 100 STUDENTS ENROLLED



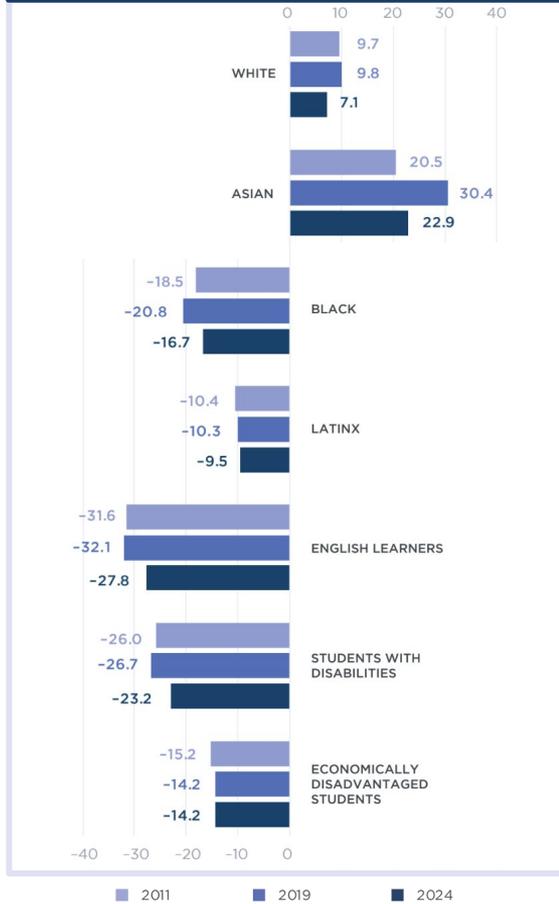
- **Suspensions and expulsions have decreased significantly since 2014**
- **Sadly, equity gaps persist, especially for Black students**

Roughly a third of students are demonstrating proficiency in reading and math



- Illinois' proficiency and national ranking have remained remarkably stable – but rates are concerning low
- Illinois students weathered the pandemic better than most states

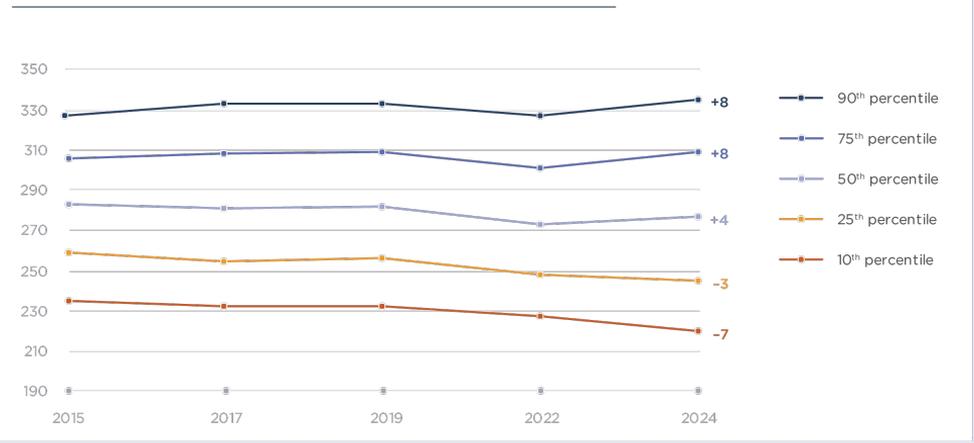
GAP TO STATEWIDE PROFICIENCY RATE IN 8TH GRADE READING



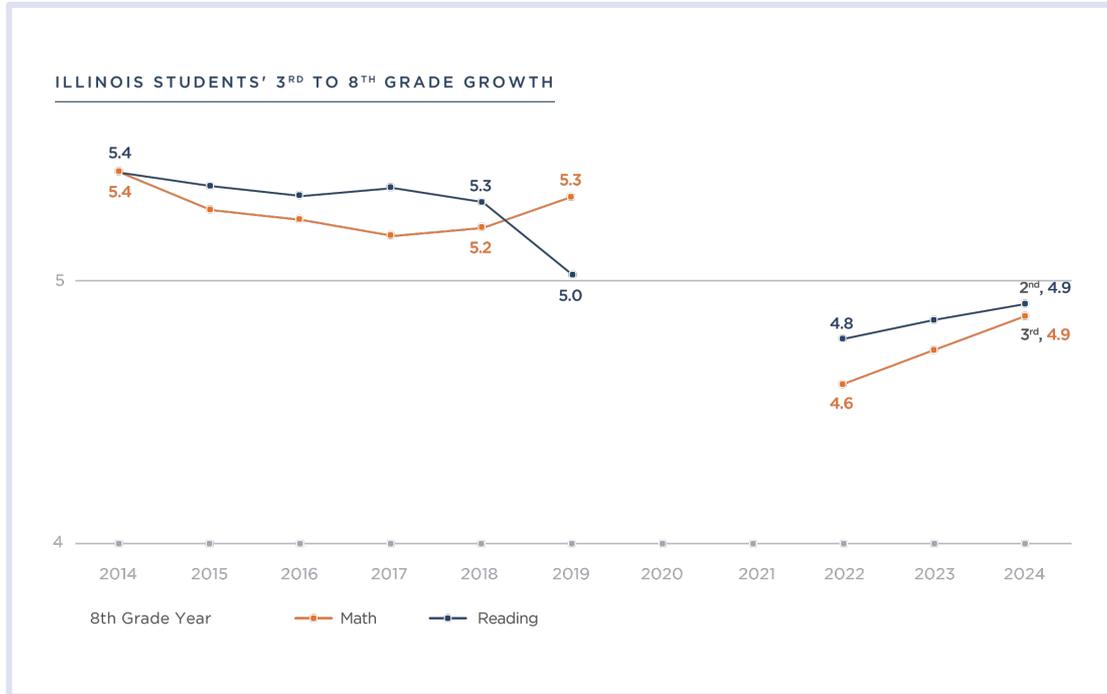
Inequitable learning outcomes persist in Illinois

- Longstanding equity gaps in both proficiency and measures of growth have begun to close across all student groups
- Gaps are not closing quickly enough
- Struggling students have not rebounded from the pandemic at the same rate as higher-scoring students

AVERAGE 8TH GRADE MATH NAEP SCORES BY PERCENTILES OVER TIME



Illinois continues to outperform other states in student growth, but our own growth is still recovering from the pandemic.



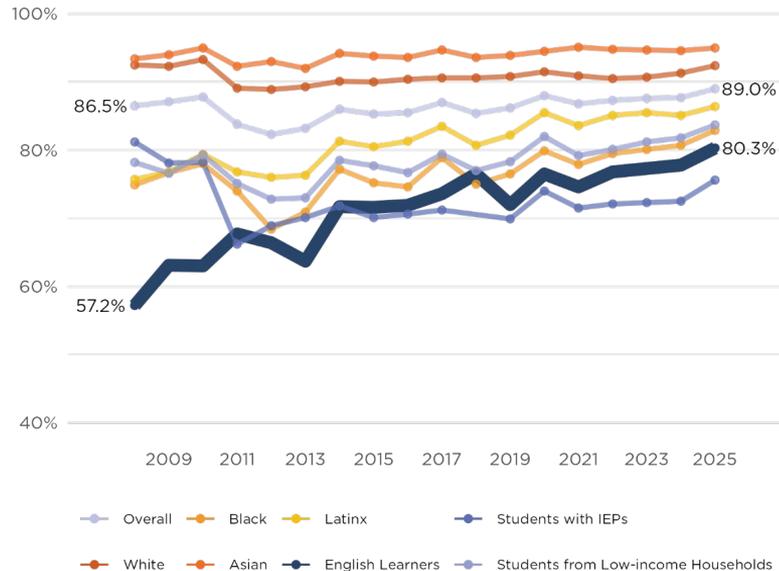
- Illinois ranked 2nd and 3rd in the nation for reading and math growth
 - 2023 also had top 5 rankings for both subjects
- Still, only half of Illinois districts showed more improvement than the median national district
 - Historic highs for this metric had 60–70% districts outperforming the median
- Recent 8th grade cohorts have not achieved 5 years of growth

Source: Stanford Education Data Archive (Version SEDA 2024).

Note: Figure created from table 50. Performing at the 8th grade level in this context refers to the national average performance of an 8th grader in select pre-pandemic cohorts

Other key indicators of success have shown positive progress in recent years

STATEWIDE ILLINOIS 4-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE BY STUDENT GROUP



- **Equity gaps are closing for 9th Grade on Track and graduation rates**

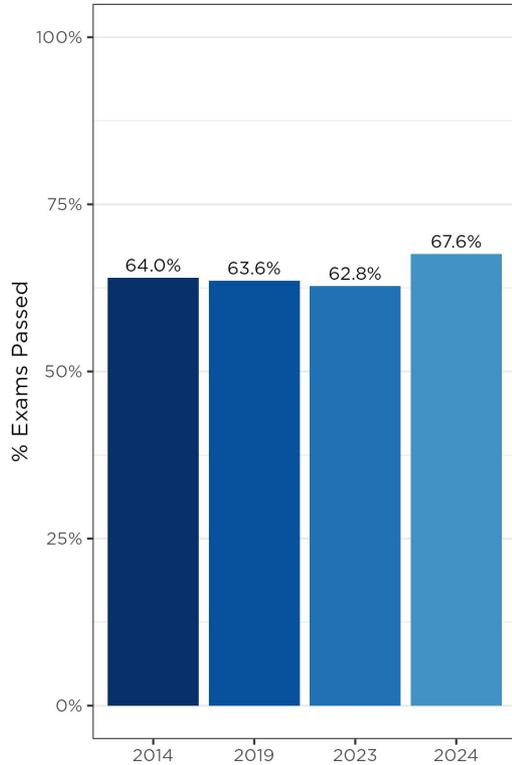
9th Grade on Track

- **On track rose again in 2025 and hit a high point of 89.3%**
- **While Black students, students from low-income households, and English Learners all trail the statewide average by over 6 percentage points, these gaps have been steadily closing**

Graduation Rates

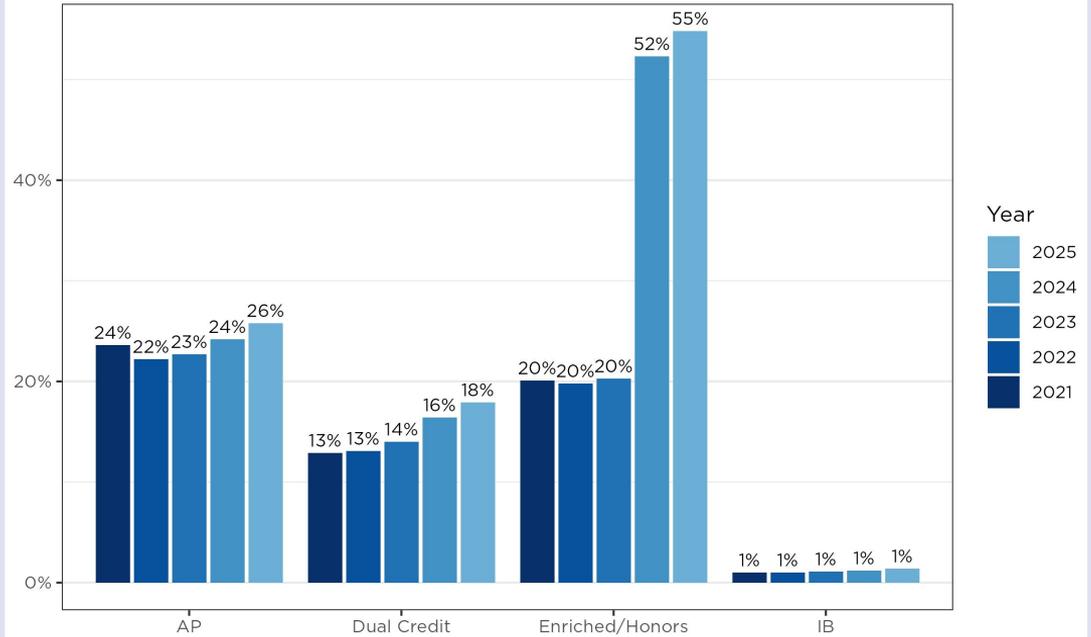
- **4YR grad rates in 2025 were at a historic high at 89%.**
- **Black, Latinx, and students from low-income households have had significant growth in graduation rates**
- **English Learners have had exceptional growth in graduation rates**

PERCENTAGE OF 10TH – 12TH GRADE AP EXAMS PASSED



More students are taking college-level courses in high school and passing rates are higher

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS TAKING ADVANCED COURSES



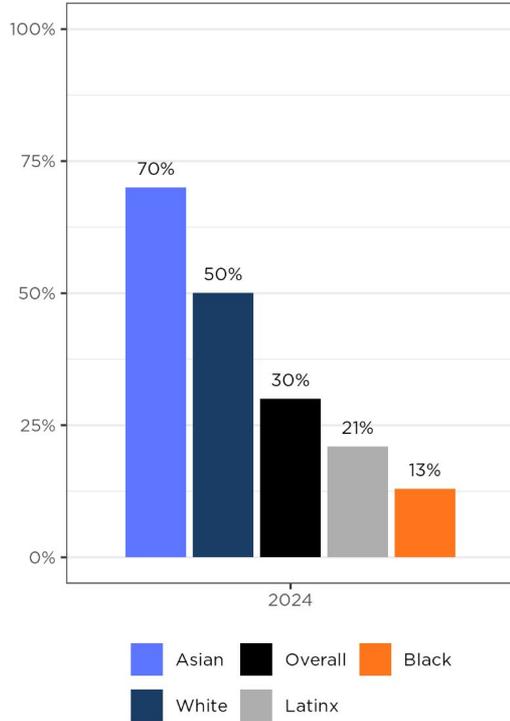
Note: The denominator for percentage of students taking courses is the total high school students from the year-end enrollment count that is tied to the home school. The 2021-2023 Enriched/Honors percentage used the total year-end enrollment count that is tied to the home school, instead of the count of high schoolers.

Similarly, access to the College and Career Readiness Endorsement (CCRE) has expanded

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Districts	30	39	94	159
Students	596	1,072	2,422	2,671

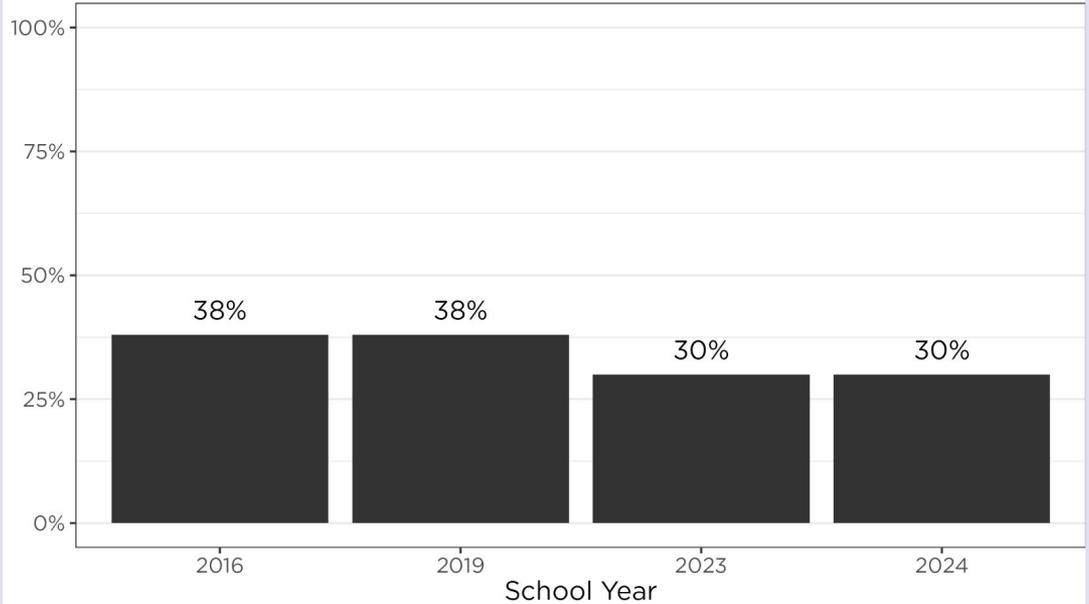
- **Both the number of districts offering college and career pathway endorsements and the number of students earning endorsements more than doubled from 2023 to 2024.**
- **Endorsements continue to grow in 2025, albeit much more slowly.**

2024 SAT College and Career Readiness Rate by Race/Ethnicity

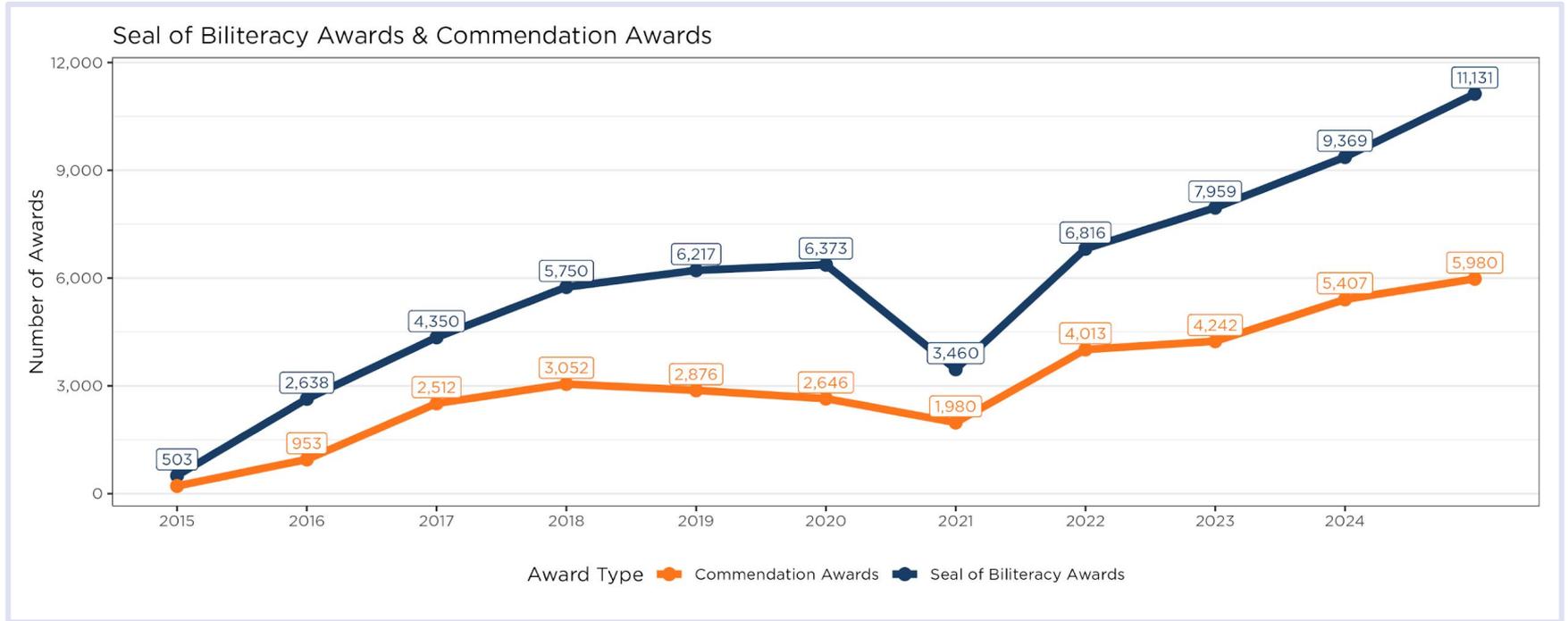


However, fewer students are meeting SAT College and Career Readiness Benchmarks

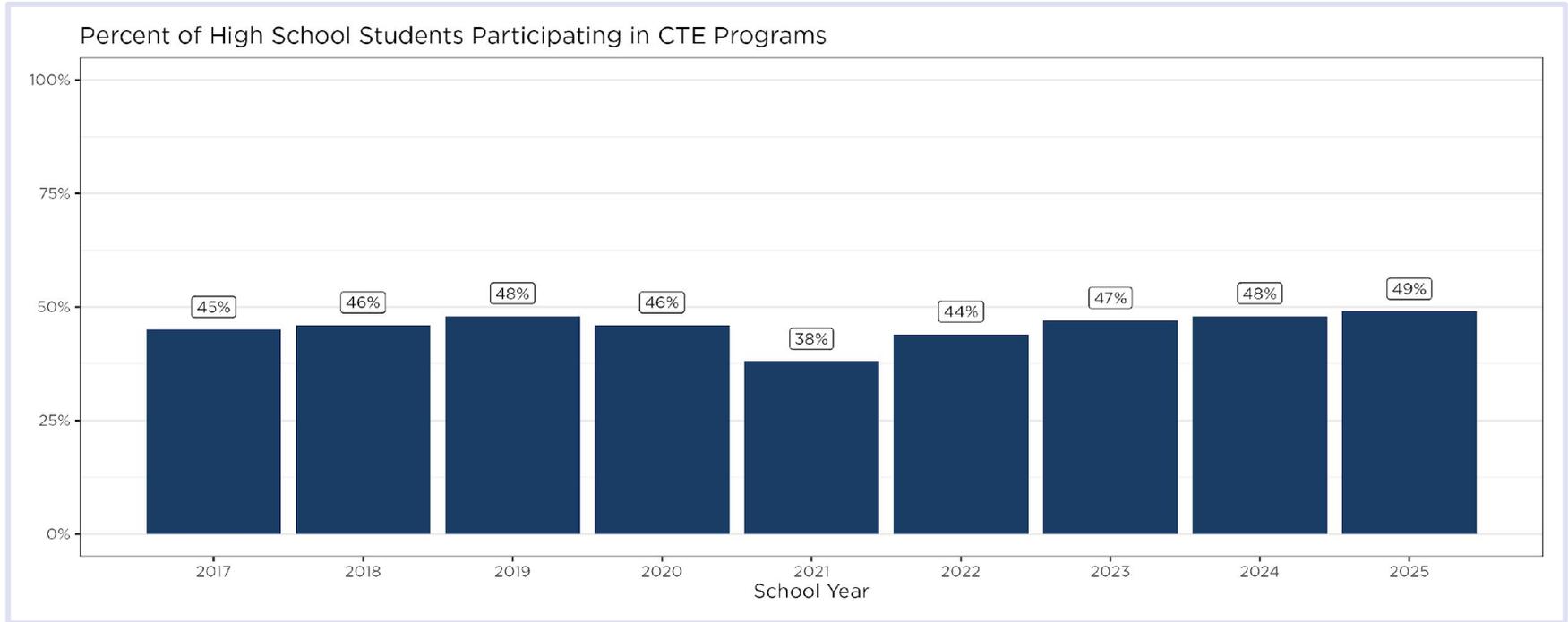
Overall SAT College and Career Readiness Rate



Exceptional growth in students attaining biliteracy awards continued in 2025



In 2025, CTE participation exceeded pre-pandemic levels

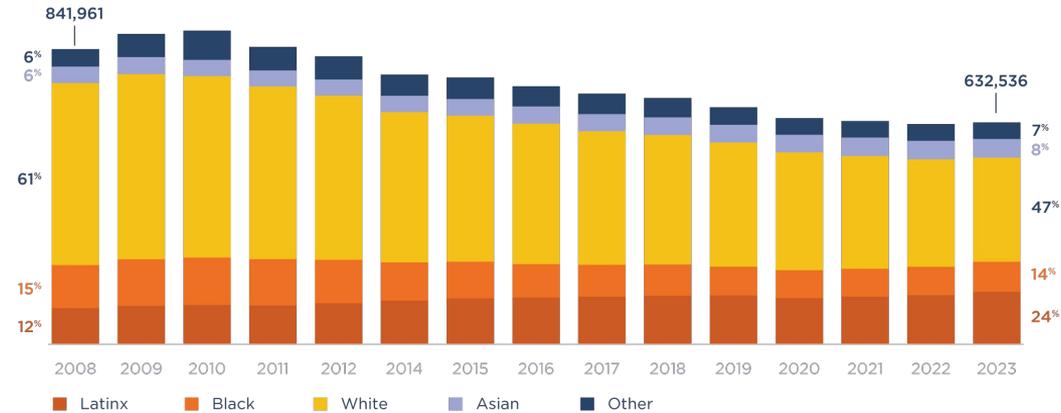




HIGHER EDUCATION

Both enrollment in postsecondary institutions in Illinois and rates of college-going high school graduates have decreased. Meanwhile, the student body has become more diverse.

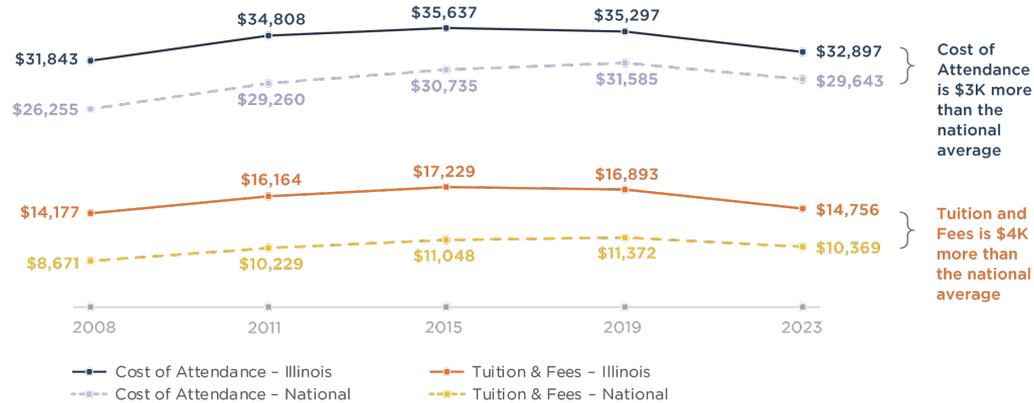
POSTSECONDARY STUDENT ENROLLMENT AT ILLINOIS INSTITUTIONS BY RACE



- Illinois postsecondary enrollment has dropped by 28% over the past 15 years
- Postsecondary institutions have become more socioeconomically diverse
- Pandemic disruptions had real impacts on student enrollment

Low state investment in higher education has created an affordability crisis

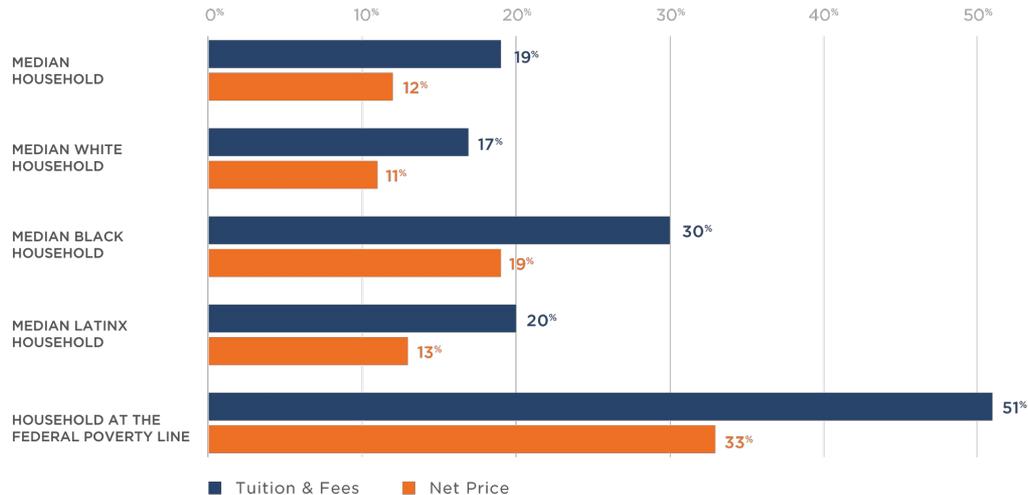
AVERAGE COST OF ATTENDANCE AND TUITION & FEES AT PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN ILLINOIS AND NATIONWIDE (IN 2023 DOLLARS)



- Illinois ranks 48th in per-student spending on higher education
- Low state-spending causes high tuition and fees for public universities, where Illinois ranks 46th
- Tuition and fees for community colleges are more affordable where Illinois ranks 18th, closely mirroring the national average
- The median amount of postsecondary debt has risen for Illinois residents across all institution types
 - \$4,865 (2010) → \$7,628 (2021)

Net prices are significantly lower than tuition and fees, but significant inequities exist

COST OF 4-YEAR PUBLIC UNIVERSITY AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN 2023



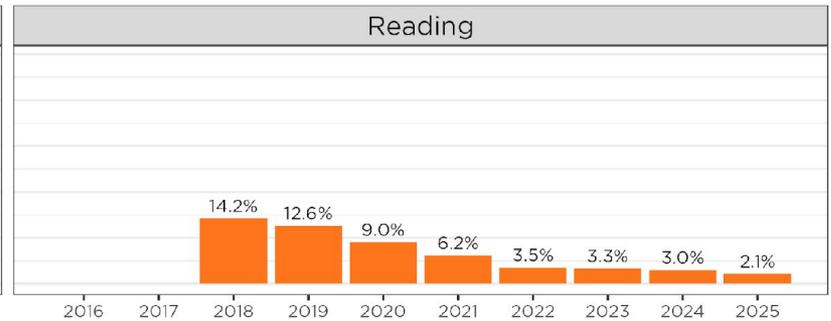
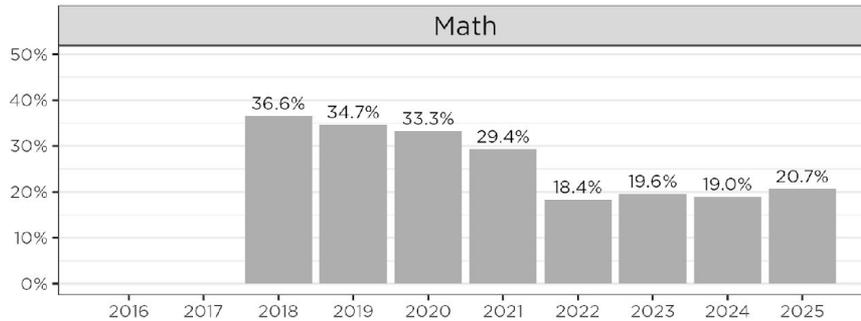
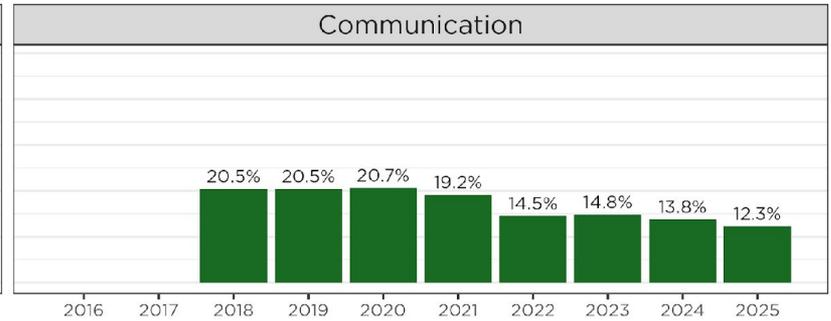
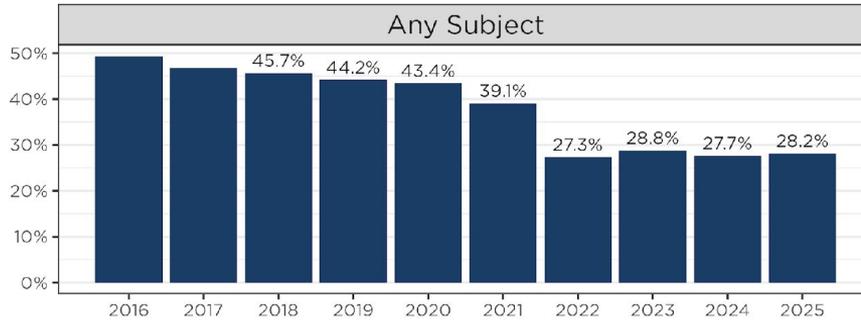
- High tuition and fees take up too much of household income
- Black and Latinx families shoulder a greater burden
- State financial aid and institutional scholarships help bring down the net price
 - Illinois increased investments in the Monetary Award Program (MAP) by 77% from 2019 to 2025.
 - The average award for public university MAP students has increased since 2010 from \$3,636 to \$5,764 in 2023

Sources: US Census, 2023; IPEDS 2023; HHS 2023; ISAC Data Book, Part Two: Monetary Award Program.

Note: Net price factors in state and institutional financial aid which helps paint a picture of the true cost for students and families

Figure created from tables 63a & 64a

After significant decreases in college remediation following the DERA Act, in 2025 the percentage of students taking remedial courses increased in math but continued to decrease in reading and communication.



Increased supports and increased retention

Illinois institutions are spending more on academic and student supports

- **Services include:**
 - Academic tutoring
 - Student wellness supports
 - Wraparound services that assist students to and through their education
- **This is true despite the leveling-off of per-pupil state appropriations since 2011**

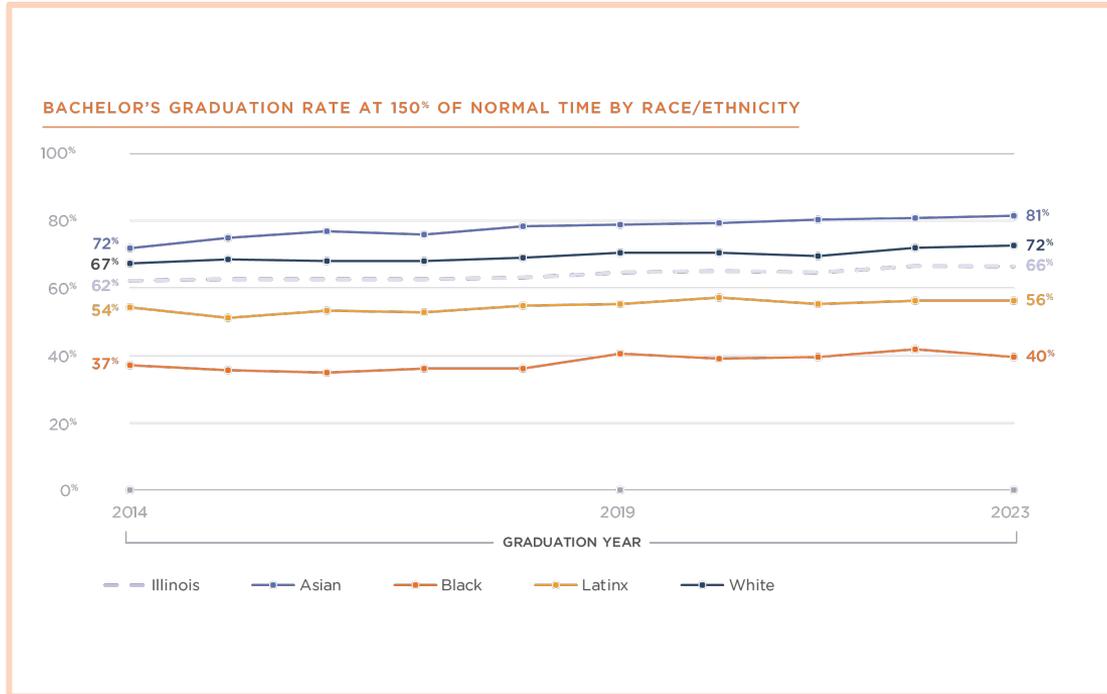


Retention rates have improved from 2010 to 2023

- **Full-time students' retention has increased from 71% to 76%**
- **Part-time students' retention has also improved from 42% to 48%, but remains stubbornly low**
- **At public universities, Black and Latinx students are less likely to be retained than the statewide average**
 - **Statewide average: 80.3%**
 - **Black student retention: 59.2%**
 - **Latinx student retention: 75.3%**

Graduation rates continue to improve

- Graduation rates inched up for bachelor's and associate's degrees across all student groups
 - Worrisome gaps still exist for Black and Latinx college completion
- Illinois students that transfer from community colleges complete their bachelor's degrees at the highest rates across the country
 - However, the number of students transferring has dropped 32% in the last decade



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY



The state has made meaningful progress in overall attainment and in closing equity gaps

- Professional Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Associate's Degree
- Some College
- Some High School or Less



Q&A

Connecting State Data to Local

- **Which of the state trends shared today do you most clearly see reflected in your community and the work you do?**
- **Which trend feels least reflective of your community's experience?**

Understanding Barriers and Opportunities

- **What local factors (policies, funding, leadership, partnerships) help explain the progress or challenges you're seeing in your work?**
- **What's missing from this data that you wish we could see?**
- **Looking at these trends, what gives you the most hope and what gives you the most concern?**

THANK YOU!

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