

**REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON HIGH SCHOOL
GRADUATION ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS
TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE LEGISLATURE**

APRIL 2013



**Elaine Allensworth, Co-Chair
Miguel del Valle, Co-Chair**

April 15, 2013

TO: The Honorable Pat Quinn, Governor
The Honorable John J. Cullerton, Senate President
The Honorable Christine Radogno, Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Michael J. Madigan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Tom Cross, House Republican Leader

FROM: Elaine Allensworth
Miguel del Valle
Commission Co-Chairs

RE: Report of the Commission on High School Graduation, Achievement and Success

Pursuant to the requirements of Public Act 97-0911 that established the Commission on High School Graduation, Achievement and Success, we respectfully submit the final report of the Commission. The report is the product of several months of work on behalf of representatives from various education groups. The full membership of the Commission is listed in the report. The report was compiled with consultation and guidance from the Illinois State Board of Education, school managers and district leaders, teachers and representatives from several alternative education programs.

This report addresses the many challenges that our State faces as we seek to assure that all students successfully complete high school and are well prepared to continue in college or on a career path. We hope that this report provides useful and comprehensive information to members of the General Assembly as they consider further measures to improve our graduation rates and provide students with opportunities that prepare them for the workforce in the 21st century. The report also makes recommendations that, if implemented, should serve to improve graduation and achievement rates.

If you or any of your members have questions about the work of the Commission, we will be happy to provide additional information. We can be contacted through Amber Kirchhoff at (312) 814-3878 or amber.kirchhoff@illinois.gov.

Sincerely,



Elaine Allensworth
Commission Co-chair



Miguel del Valle
Commission Co-chair

COMMISSION ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION ACHIEVEMENT AND SUCCESS

In Spring 2012, the Illinois General Assembly passed legislation that was signed by the Governor to create a Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success. The members of the Commission comprise a wide spectrum of educators, school leaders, teachers and advocates who have expertise, experience and knowledge that is essential in addressing this important topic. The work of the Commission and its recommendations are contained in this report. It is designed to help the State and local school districts shape policies and practices that will increase the number of students who successfully complete high school and who go on to pursue college and workforce credentials. This effort will allow the State to move closer to its primary educational goal to have 60% of the adult population in Illinois with a high quality college degree or credential by 2025. The Commission believes that the most critical factor in assessing and determining whether a student will successfully complete high school is the ability to monitor and track student performance in the freshman year. This finding shapes the framework of this report and is central to achieving the desired outcome for all students.

Freshman On-Track Indicator

The freshman 'on-track' indicator is a measure of progress in the student's first year of high school that can help to identify those students who are most at-risk of not graduating. Timely intervention can make the difference in helping these students succeed and graduate.

Commission Members

Elaine Allensworth (Co-Chair) Interim Executive Director, University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research and the Managing Director of the Urban Education Institute.

Miguel del Valle (Co-Chair) – P-20 Council Former State Senator and Chicago City Clerk. Chair of the P-20 Council and member of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Senator Kimberly A. Lightford – 4th Senate District

Illinois State Senator since 1998. Member of the Assignments, Education (Vice-Chair), Executive, Executive Appointments, and Financial Institutions committees.

Senator Dave Luechtefeld – 58th Senate District

Illinois State Senator since 1995 - former teacher, athletic director and coach and member of the Education, Executive, Executive Appointments, and Higher Ed. committees.

Representative Linda Chapa LaVia – 83rd District

Illinois State Representative since 2003. Served as the Chairperson of the Elementary & Secondary Education committee and was a member of the Financial Institutions, Telecommunications, Environment & Energy Bio-Technology, and Veterans' Affairs.

Representative Sandy Cole – 62nd District

Representative Cole served in the Illinois House from 2007 to 2013. Served on the Appropriations – General Services and Appropriations – Elementary & Secondary Education.

Dr. Andrea Brown – ISBE

Board member of the Illinois State Board of Education.

Akeshia Craven-Howell – CPS

Director of the Office of Pathways to College and Career at Chicago Public Schools.

Stacy Davis-Gates – CTU

Political Activities Director for the Chicago Teachers Union and former teacher in the Chicago Public School system.

Dr. Lynne Haeffele – Lt. Governor's Office

Senior Policy Director for Education and former Researcher in the Center for the Study of Education Policy at Illinois State University.

Rhonda Jenkins – Illinois PTA

Vice President of Programs for the Illinois PTA.

Dr. Vanessa Kinder – Intermediate Service Ctr.

Executive Director of the South Suburban Cook Intermediate Service Center. Recently served on the Streamlining Illinois' Regional Offices of Education Commission.

Early King – IL Association of Non-Public Schools

K12 Inc. and head of their YCCS Virtual High School.

Rich Lesniak – IASBO

Director of business services at Lockport Township High School - former high school teacher and principal.

Al Llorens – IEA

Secretary-Treasurer of the Illinois Education Association and former high school math teacher in Dolton.

Members (cont)

Jeff Mays – IL Business Roundtable

President, IBRT

Dr. Mark McDonald – LEND

Co-chair of the Legislative Education Network of DuPage County and also the Superintendent of Community High School District #99.

Melissa Mitchell – Federation for Community Schools

Executive Director for the Federation for Community Schools.

Candace Mueller – IASB

Assistant Director of External Relations at the Illinois Board of Higher Education and member of the Springfield School Board for District 5.

Jane Russell – IFT

Vice President – Illinois Federation of Teachers and President of the West Suburban Teachers Union.

Diane Rutledge – LUDA

Executive Director of the Large Unit District Association and most recently the Superintendent of School District 186 in Springfield.

Jack Wuest – Alternative Schools Network

Executive Director of the Alternative Schools Network.

Julie Wollerman – ROE

Regional Superintendent for Regional Office of Education 3 that serves Bond, Fayette, and Effingham Counties.

Dr. Victor Zimmerman

Superintendent, Monticello District 25.

PARTICIPANTS/CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Christopher Koch, Illinois State Board of Education

Mike McKindles, Illinois State Board of Education

Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University

Keisha Davis Johnson, Principal, West Town Academy

Brianna Johnson, Student, West Town Academy
Elizabeth Kirby, Network Chief, Chicago Public Schools

William Leavy, Executive Director, Greater West Town Community Development Project

Dr. Lazaro Lopez, Principal, Wheeling High School

Sheila Venson, Executive Director, Youth Connection Charter School

Kye Gaffey, Superintendent, Department of Juvenile Justice

Rene Crespin, University of Chicago

Lara Mbayed, Dunn Fellow, Office of the Governor

Sarah Myerscough-Mueller, Education

Legislative Liaison, Office of the Governor

Julie Smith, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor

Adam Weiner, Dunn Fellow, Office of the Governor

Introduction

The high school dropout crisis remains one of America's most pressing challenges. Leading national educators and organizations continue to focus attention on this issue and the nation's governors have advocated in support of a comprehensive approach to dropout prevention and student success. Those students who fail to finish high school face a lifetime of economic hardship. Research shows that students who drop out are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed. They consistently earn less on average when they are employed; they are more likely to receive public assistance; and they are more likely to enter the criminal justice system than those who complete high school. Nationally, almost one student in every five drops out of high school and we now have approximately five million young adults between 18 and 24 who lack a high school diploma.¹

In his 2012 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama called upon every state to require that all students stay in high school until they graduate or turn 18. According to President Obama, "We also know that when students don't walk away from their education, more of them walk the stage to get their diploma. When students are not allowed to drop out, they do better."² The President's proposal reflected the critical importance of assuring that all students graduate from high school well prepared for college and the workforce.

In the 2012 *Diplomas Count* report, ED Week reported a slight increase in graduation rates nationwide – and a gain in the graduation rates for both African American and Latino students when compared to white students.³ While this annual report shows a small measure of improvement, the nation still faces a significant challenge in trying to reduce the number of high school students who fail to graduate each year. In 2009, more than one million students dropped out before completing high school. In Illinois, the challenge is equally great. ED Week reported almost no change in its averaged graduation rate for Illinois. The most recent cohort graduation rate report from the Department of Education shows that about 16% of Illinois students do not graduate from high school. The numbers jump to 23% and 26% for Latino and African American students statewide.⁴

Students often give different reasons for dropping out of school but researchers have identified four primary areas that determine this choice for most students.⁵ Students who fail academically are very likely to stop attending school. Academic failure is a product of lack of readiness, insufficient preparation and work effort, and most importantly, a failure to attend classes. As students accumulate failures, they fall further behind in credits needed to obtain a diploma. Students who are disinterested in

¹ Princiotta, D. and Reyna, R., NGA Center for Best Practices, "Achieving Graduation for All," 2009-10.

² President Barack Obama, "State of the Union Address," January 24, 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/01/24/remarks-president-state-union-address>.

³ ED Weekly, "Diplomas Count," June, 2012.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, "Four Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate," SY 2010-11. See Appendix I.

⁵ Rumberger, R. and Lim, S. A, "Why Students Drop Out of School: A Review of 25 Years of Research," Policy Brief 15 (Santa Barbara, CA., October 2008).

school or who fail to find good reasons for attending are very likely to drop out of school. Absences are the largest and most significant reason for failure. Many students will drop out after missing significant time at school.

A third reason for dropping out is related to problematic behavior both in and out of school. Students who are suspended or expelled – or those who are involved in the juvenile justice system – often stop attending. Finally, there are students whose life demands often push them to drop out. Teens who become pregnant or who need to work or who must care for a family member often drop out of school due to these challenges and demands on their time.

The national discussion on school dropouts has caused many States to rethink and re-examine their efforts to address this critical issue. Numerous organizations, including the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Education Association, have voiced support for raising the compulsory school age to 18 and providing the support that students need to succeed. The NASSP argues that, along with comprehensive support and complementary changes, state leaders should: “...Make every effort to increase the maximum compulsory age for school attendance to 18 for all students who have not already completed the requirements for a high school diploma.”⁶ The challenge for States and school districts across the nation is how to promote high school graduation for all during a time of serious fiscal constraints. Programs in Illinois that are specifically designed to target youth who are at risk of dropping out have had a significant reduction in funding. New programs that were designed to re-enroll students who have already dropped out have never received support from the State. It is in this difficult fiscal environment that we seek to identify the most effective programs and the most successful practices to assure that all students complete high school. We need to find ways to identify those who are most at risk before they fail or drop out in order to keep them in school. We seek the most effective ways to provide academic and career options during high school that keep students engaged and enrolled.

History and Charge

Illinois raised its compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 17 in 2005. In 2012, Senate Bill 3259 was introduced in the General Assembly, proposing to raise the compulsory school age to 18. After debate and consideration, the bill was amended to create the Commission for High School Graduation Achievement and Success. The Commission is tasked with studying high school success and graduation rates in Illinois.

⁶ National Association of Secondary School Principals, “Raising the Compulsory School Attendance Age.” Adopted May 7, 2010.

http://www.nassp.org/Content.aspx?topic=Raising_the_Compulsory_School_Attendance_Age_Proposed

Senate Bill 3259⁷ outlined the membership requirements and topics upon which the Commission would focus its efforts. The compulsory attendance age and high school graduation rates were at the center of the Commission's mission, but SB 3259 also required consideration of a broad array of related topics, including student success after high school. The bill required the Commission to present the Governor and the General Assembly with its findings and recommendations related to the following topics:

1. Graduation rates in Illinois
2. Illinois' mandatory attendance age
3. Alternative educational programs currently being used in Illinois, including those which are the most successful. Examination of why the programs are successful, and whether they can be used by other school districts in Illinois
4. The funding structures and options for the alternative programs and school support programs
5. Alternative education programs being used in other states and whether they would be successful in school districts in Illinois
6. The effect that high school graduation has upon the job outlook for individuals

The General Assembly noted in its resolution that compulsory attendance is one piece of the education spectrum, but there are clearly a wide range of factors and practices that impact educational attainment. The problems of truancy and dropouts are strongly influenced by the broad social context of schools, families, communities and States. There is a need to recognize the impact of all of these factors – but the Commission was charged with examining most closely those elements that can be addressed by school practice and State policy.

The composition of the membership of the Commission was designed to encompass a wide range of expertise and experience in this field. Commission members included representatives from school boards, school administrators, regional education programs, school districts, alternative school programs and business and professional leaders. The work of this Commission builds upon the work of other groups who have considered the challenges that we face as we consider ways to improve the high school graduation rate. The Commission includes some members who participated on the *Task Force on Re-Enrolling Students who Dropped Out of School* and they shared the results of that report with members. In addition, the Commission has been informed of the on-going work of the *School Success Task Force* that is delving into the difficult issues of school suspensions and expulsions.

The work of the Commission has been informed by the work of the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research and the research work of Robert Balfanz who serves as the co-director of the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University. Principals and teachers from public schools and alternative schools spoke to the Commission about the on-going programs and support systems that they have in place to keep students enrolled and on-track to receive a diploma. During the time that the Commission was meeting, the Chicago Tribune published its series on the problems of truancy across the State and how attendance problems can begin at a very early age. The on-going work of the

⁷ See Appendix II.

Chicago Consortium illustrated the importance of 8th grade students entering high school ready and prepared for freshman studies. This Tribune series showed the importance of keeping students in the classroom and on-track at each stage of their education.⁸

The work of the Commission and the charge from the Legislature is ultimately defined by the need of the State to have a well-trained and highly-skilled workforce for the 21st century. Children who were born in 2012 will graduate from high school in 2030. If they have a normal career span, they will be working until 2075 and beyond. It is impossible to know what skills and expertise they will need over that time span. It is safe to say that it will be distinctly different from what we know today –and that the technological changes will be extensive. The economic well-being of our State is dependent upon the success of our schools and colleges in preparing a well-trained workforce and in providing opportunities for citizens to consistently upgrade their skills. High school dropouts have much higher unemployment rates than those who have a diploma or a post-secondary credential. The State loses tax revenues when its citizens are under-employed or without jobs altogether. The State also pays higher costs in public assistance or health care when there are large numbers of its citizens who lack a high school diploma.

This report encompasses the deliberations, the findings and the recommendations of the Commission. The members of this group recognize the need for a continuous commitment to analysis, review and examination of efforts to achieve the desired result of all students completing high school ready for college or career. High school achievement, success and graduation are the ultimate goals for all Illinois students. The Commissioners are committed to continuing work with the Governor, the General Assembly, State education and workforce agencies and all other stakeholders in this critical task.

Presentations to the Commission

Presentation by the Illinois State Board of Education

Members from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) gave the commission a presentation on issues related to defining, identifying, and reporting of dropout and graduation rates.

First, they provided details about the dropout and graduation rate calculations currently being used by ISBE. To calculate 4-year graduation rates, ISBE uses raw data entered by school districts to define freshman cohorts, and then track entering first-time freshmen and transfer-in students for four years. School districts input data on student enrollment into the same enrollment file, so that students cannot simultaneously be assigned to multiple schools. However, school districts vary in their capacity around data use, so their frequencies and methods of sending data to ISBE differ. Districts receive annual training and assistance from ISBE around data issues. To calculate graduation rates, ISBE takes the number of students in a ninth grade cohort that graduate by the summer after the fourth year and divides this number by an adjusted cohort base number that does not include students who validly

⁸ Jackson, D., and Marx, G., “School Truancy” and “A Challenge Unmet,” November, 2012.

transfer-out (with official written documentation), emigrate from the country (without documentation), or die. The graduates in this calculation only include those that receive a *regular high school diploma*, which does not include diplomas awarded by alternative education programs, high school equivalency certificates (GED), or honorary diplomas/certificates of completion issued by local school districts (e.g. SPED certificates).

Students' outcomes are only counted once, and cannot appear with multiple cohorts. If, for example, a student drops out or transfers and then transfers back in, only the final outcome of that student will go into the outcome's calculation. In regards to students that emigrate, if a student moves to another country then comes back and does not re-register, he or she is not counted as a dropout because he or she will have been validly removed from the cohort. Illinois has few restrictions or guidelines on home schooling and no formal registration is required, which may lead to some miscoded outcomes.

ISBE officials also reported on current resources available for dropout prevention and recovery; these include Truants' Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP), Regional Safe Schools Program (RSSP), and the Alternative Learning Opportunities Program (ALOP). The TAOEP integrates resources of the school and community to meet the needs of students with attendance problems and/or dropouts through the age of 21, and provides truancy prevention and intervention services with optional education. The RSSP is a statewide program that has served expulsion- and suspension-eligible students in grades 6-12 since FY97. Furthermore, ALOP aims to enable school districts to offer a broader range of academic, behavioral, and social/emotional interventions designed to increase the academic achievement levels of students who need educational supports and other services not currently provided by their schools.

Forthcoming efforts from ISBE aim to provide student and school specific data to allow for early interventions that will reach students when they first experience difficulty in school, reducing the risk of them dropping out. The Illinois Shared Learning Environment (ISLE) aims to get information into the classroom allowing teachers and students an easier understanding of the progress and needs of individual students, classes, and cohorts, leading to more personalized and timely support. Furthermore, the new Longitudinal Data System (LDS) will integrate data from various systems to give a fuller picture of the student, especially at transition points, which will allow for earlier identification of students, when they are in need of intervention.

Presentation by Elaine Allensworth, PhD (CSR)

The decision to persist in or leave school is affected by interacting factors that accumulate throughout a student's life: gender, poverty, race, test scores, mobility, over-age for grade, special education status, and ELL status in high school. Although these background variables may affect graduation, the relationship is not very strong—using all these background variables correctly identifies students that graduate only 65% of the time.

For a long time it was thought that an accurate prediction of graduation was not possible because of the interconnectedness of the outside factors that affect graduation—however, the mentioned background characteristics affect the decision to drop out or graduate through their effects on a student's course

performance. A simple indicator of performance that checks whether students have made basic progress in their 9th grade year can be formed based on if they have enough credits to be counted as sophomores and have no more than one semester F. By itself, this indicator correctly identifies 80% of graduates, which is better than all background variables individually or combined. The on-track indicator is so strong that students who are on-track in 9th grade are four times more likely to graduate than students who are off-track. These indicators can easily help identify students who are at risk, which suggests that a way to improve graduation rates is to improve students' classroom performance.

Students experience a big difference in monitoring and support when transitioning from elementary school to high school. In 8th grade, teachers are more familiar with the students and usually monitor them in a more structured environment. In the 9th grade, the school environment is much different. Teachers do not have the same opportunity to monitor the student during the entire day and there is an expectation that the student must recognize that they need to monitor their own participation and attendance. If students are not keeping pace with the work that is assigned or are missing school on a regular basis, then they are also likely to fail academically. Furthermore, students experience new responsibilities in high school that they many times mistake for freedoms. As an example, 9th graders might say they do not have to go to class and that teachers will not make them do their work. This transitional mismatch makes students overall vulnerable to experience a decline in their academic performance and prone to withdraw from school. Since this environment transition is experienced by students overall, 8th grade performance only gives us a moderate prediction of a student's high school performance. There is a group of students with extremely low grades and/or low attendance rates in the middle grades that can be identified as highly at-risk of dropout who could be targets of early intervention. However, many students do not show signs of failure until they reach high school, which is why ninth grade monitoring systems are needed.

The 9th grade on-track indicator cannot really be used for intervention purposes since it is a metric that is generated at the end of the 9th grade, at which point the intervention would already be too late. Rather, other indicators of students' early performance in 9th grade can be used to target those students that may not be on-track—GPA is the best predictor of graduation and can help target specific at-risk students who are at risk of not graduating. Along with GPA, we know that absences also are connected to GPA and to the probability of graduating and dropping out. A week of absences in the first semester of 9th grade decreases the likelihood of graduating by 25 percentage points, while 2 weeks of absences decreases graduation likelihood from 87% to 41%. Schools have the potential to intervene and improve their students' on-track statuses early in their high school careers by **monitoring students' course grades and absences** from the start of the ninth grade year, and intervening immediately when attendance students miss class or receive a low interim grade.

High absence rates are an important factor explaining the lower academic performance and graduation rates of students with a learning disability, a mild cognitive disability, or an emotional disturbance. These students are more likely to be off track and to be more off track than other students. Similarly, students who start high school with skills two years below grade level are less likely to graduate. The students without identified disabilities that are two or more years below grade level often do not

receive support, even though they are actually more likely to be off track than students with identified learning disabilities.

English Language Learners (ELL) compose another subset of students that experience different circumstances. In Chicago, the vast majority of ELLs are Hispanic and they are very different from African Americans, Whites, and Asians in their outcomes, although the early warning indicators can be used just as well with ELLs as with non-ELLs. ELLs who are new to CPS (and possibly new to the country) in middle or high school are very likely to be on track, have very high attendance, and are more likely to pass classes than typical Hispanic students. However, these students are less likely to graduate than on-track students. Even those ELLs that are on-track are less likely to graduate than other on-track students. The biggest reason for the disparity between new ELL students and long-term proficient Hispanic students is the high schools they attend: new ELL students are unlikely to attend magnet schools or the higher performing neighborhood and charter high schools. New ELL students may struggle to navigate the enrollment process, they also tend to enter high school past the age of 14 which makes them less likely to graduate, and they also tend to have lower educational aspirations. There are also ELL students in high school who have been in the system for years but have never achieved proficiency in English—these students are less likely to be on track and many of these students have identified disabilities and look a lot like others with identified disabilities in their outcomes, which makes sense since they have remained in ELL status for such a long period. These students tend to have high absence rates and are less likely than other students to be on-track in ninth grade. Students who started out as ELLs that achieved proficiency in elementary school are more likely to be on track and more likely to graduate than non-ELL students.

Recently, CPS has been very successful in using data to improve on-track and graduation rates. In 2008, CPS created a real time data system around 9th grade indicators. It was an early warning system that gave schools lists of students who were flagged for risk factors based on 8th grade data. In 9th grade they would get lists of students that were flagged if their absences suddenly increased or they received an F. It also offered a credit recovery report detailing which students had to make up classes. The lists came out on a timely basis and were a tremendous help to the schools—this allowed teachers and schools to devise strategies to support the students. For example, teachers with the same students could collaborate together around those students. Some schools had coordinators who would reach out to students and their parents if they received a D or F on a report card. One school had every student's teacher call home if they missed a day and that made the students realize that they cannot get away with skipping school, which established relationships between teachers and parents. Currently, CPS and other districts that have followed CPS' model use this form of early data distribution, and the National High School Center has also created a tool for districts to use, similar to what CPS uses.

The on-track indicator and CPS's usage of this indicator suggest that if students receive the help they need right away then they start to see teachers as very supportive and caring, while if no one reaches out to them they fall further behind and become frustrated with school.

Presentation by Robert Balfanz, PhD (Everyone Graduates Center and Center for Social Organization of Schools)

Contrary to certain beliefs, it is known that students do not want to drop out of school, because they know that graduation will provide them with the chance for a better life. Students actually only drop out when they feel they have no other option, often after long periods of struggle.

There are four main categories of reasons why students tend to drop out. First, some students always have and always will dropout because of **life events**, which usually means a pregnancy, arrest, or the need to work to support their family. The solution to dropouts due to life events, is finding ways to deal with the challenge while still providing those students with a path to graduation. Secondly, there are students known as **fade-outs**, who almost make it to graduation, but dropout 5 or less credits short of graduation. To these students a diploma will not matter with the jobs they are likely to get and believe that, if needed, a GED can provide them with the same outcomes—very often these students regret that decision. This group would greatly benefit from a career pathways education, giving them more career relevance and a high school diploma. The next group of students is categorized as the **push-outs**. These are students that schools decide are problematic, and can be and are pushed out once an administrative rule can be applied (e.g. legal dropout age or missing a certain amount of school). Finally, the biggest group of dropout students is where students are **not succeeding in schools**, and struggle to attend and pass their courses for a host of reasons.

Students who will drop out are signaling often and early that they are becoming disengaged from school and are struggling—these signals can be tracked through students' attendance, behavior, and course performance (ABC's). By paying attention to those signals we know we can have a more targeted effort to provide at risk students assistance much earlier. Essentially, it would be best to get the right intervention to the right students at the right time and for this there have to be different approaches for students at schools with different magnitudes of challenges. Schools can be categorized into four subsets by their magnitude of challenges:

- i. The first subset of schools is typically in the high poverty areas where there could be literally hundreds of students with off track indicators. These schools need fundamental whole school transformations because it is impossible to individually intervene, student-by-student, to fix the problem when there are hundreds of students that are falling off track.
- ii. The second set of schools has graduation rates between 60-75%, and work for some students but not all. A strong early warning intervention system is needed for these students where they are being monitored early and there is intervention at the scale that is needed. Oftentimes an intervention at this scale is a team based approach that fundamentally involves the teachers at the school. At this magnitude the load cannot be given to one counselor or graduation coach—it is really necessary to get teachers involved to implement this early warning intervention. The problem is too large for a few adults to deal with.
- iii. The third subset of schools has graduation rates above 75% but within these schools there is a pocket of students for which school is not working. It may be 20 or 30 in a class that are in trouble. At this scale a school can have a smaller scale of adults monitoring those students and really being effective.

It is crucial that the size of the intervention is matched by the size of the problem.

The Building a Grad Nation Report⁹ has eight broad recommendations that can be adopted at a statewide level:

1. Need to focus early so that we are sure that by 3rd grade children are reading at grade level.
2. Need to measure and address absenteeism. Currently, many schools and districts measure average daily attendance or how many children are in the building on any given day, but are not measuring how many students are regularly missing a lot of school. The data clearly shows that absenteeism impacts achievement, it impacts students' progression in school, and it impacts their chances of graduating so it is a big issue that has been undervalued. School and districts must find ways of connecting different organizations to help with different tasks to help students overcome life situations that may arise and cause trancies.
3. There must be a reinvention in the middle grades because that is where children are losing their pathways, and that is when they make the decision of whether school is or is not for them. Schools/districts must make sure students are having experiences that propel them to strive forward, make the right decisions, and build a sense in students that with effort come good outcomes (e.g. education provides long-term benefits).
4. Need to organize a second shift of adults in schools that have a lot of off track students because teachers and faculty are not enough to deal with all the students that need 'success monitoring'. These adults would be constantly checking on the students' academic and social status/progress.
5. Need to monitor the transition once students enter high school because that is a very critical time.
6. Need to fundamentally transform schools with high percentage of dropouts. What is currently driving these schools' high percentage of dropouts is that high needs students are concentrated in schools that are not designed to meet that challenge.
7. Need to build strong pathways to college and careers so that students can see the pathway and really believe in it. These children are often in high poverty areas; they do not have that lived experience and may not know that doing well in school leads to a better job and a better life.
8. Despite everything we cannot be perfect and we need strong dropout second chance efforts.

Schools and districts also need a policy review and audit to fix rules that made sense in the past, but are now counter-productive. For example, suspension of students who are chronically absent or failing students for missing 10 days of school.

⁹<http://www.americaspromise.org/~media/Files/Our%20Work/Grad%20Nation/Building%20a%20Grad%20Nation/BuildingAGradNation2012.ashx>

Panel Presentation/Discussion

A panel of high school principals and other stakeholders presented and discussed ideas of what they have seen and experienced to work or not work to help increase at-risk students' improvement and graduation rates. Principal Keisha Davis-Johnson, from the alternative school West Town Academy, informed the commission that her school strives to keep students in school and on track by maintaining a low staff-to-student ratio, paying close attention to students' attendance rates, having some teachers be mentors who connect students with organizations for wraparound services, and by promoting school activities to the students. Brianna Johnson, a student whose grades slipped and almost repeated 10th grade at her regular school but decided to transfer to West Town Academy instead, informed the commission of the great success she has had since leaving her regular high school and entering the alternative school. At her new school she has become a member of the student council and of the volleyball team and has been able to maintain a 4.0 GPA—she attributed her success to West Town Academy's personalized support from teachers and staff for students as opposed to her regular school where she did not feel motivated to succeed.

Bill Leavy, Executive Director of the Greater West Town Community Development Project, noted that the dropout problem will not be solved by increasing the compulsory age and that to address this substantive issue, race and gender must be taken into consideration. Sheila Venson, Executive Director of the Youth Connection Charter School, and Mr. Leavy discussed the difficulty and problems in the way transfer codes are entered and categorized, leading dropouts to many times be counted as transfers. According to them, these bad and misinterpreted codes often lead special education students and re-enrollees to be pushed and kept out of schools, which may be due to pressure from high-stakes testing.

Doctor Lazaro Lopez, Principal from Wheeling High School, was able to provide background of his efforts to maintain a 90% graduation rate in the face of numerous challenges. He attributed the school's success to its focus on building a school community through different key strategies:

1. Making high school **relevant** for all students on an individual and personalized level
2. The importance of increased and innovative academic offerings (e.g. blended schedules)
3. Providing and/or connecting students with overlapping socio-emotional support by having interns and other low/no-cost partnerships
4. Partnering with feeder k-8 schools to identify and correct problems early on
5. Focusing on strengths of the student communities (STEM, in the case of Wheeling)
6. Gear towards engaging students personally, instead of educating the masses they aim to educate the individual
7. Dr. Lopez encouraged the State to continue supporting the Pathways initiative.

Elizabeth Kirby, Network Chief for Chicago Public Schools, described how, during her time as Principal at Kenwood Academy, on-track measures and strategies changed the way the high school considered its role, making it more attuned to the needs of students. The school district held schools accountable for really knowing their students. The program also brought increased and improved mentoring, tutoring, before/afterschool homework help and various tracking methods. She expressed her belief that it is important that the State provide tracking data and trend data to schools and districts.

Presentation by Kye Gaffey (Superintendent – Department of Juvenile Justice)

The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) serves over 1,000 students in its facilities across the State. The DJJ program is a fully-accredited school program with a Superintendent and active School Board. The Department has an instructional budget for the operation of its schools and the curriculum now aligns with State standards. The DJJ schools will align their program with the Common Core as the State implements these standards over the next year. The Department has as its mission that all of its students will experience educational success and will learn how to use their education to further their career goals. DJJ faced many challenges with its schools when the Superintendent began his tenure in 2011. Most classes were taught at the lowest elementary level to serve the students who were furthest behind. In addition, students completed only 4 or 5 credits over an eight month period. There was very little follow-up with local schools when students transitioned back to their communities. It was in this environment that the new Superintendent began to consider different options for classroom instruction. DJJ chose to look at on-line education programs to provide enhanced instructional options that could serve a large number of students who were at varying levels of academic preparation.

The virtual high school offered the opportunity for DJJ to provide an updated curriculum with an expanded range of courses to its students. Virtual coursework also allows the student to achieve a smoother transition back to the local school when he or she leaves the DJJ facility. On-line course work allows students to recover credits at a faster pace and to eventually earn a high school diploma. The DJJ program was very successful in its first year of operation and the success continues in the second year. The course completion rate is 88% and students average a completion rate of 1.2 courses per month in the on-line environment. Students are building strong computer skills and have a greater comfort when faced with new technologies. Virtual courses offer the opportunity to provide instruction at the appropriate level for each student and courses can accommodate students with special needs or disabilities.

DJJ plans to expand its virtual course offerings and will deliver on-line courses in all of its facilities this year. Students and teachers are equally pleased with the on-line courses to date. Initially, the faculty was very uncertain about teaching students using virtual coursework. With strong training programs and technical support from the vendor, however, the teachers have been very pleased with the results in the program. DJJ will continue to expand on-line coursework in its own facilities and will work with high school districts to allow students to continue on-line study when they transition back to their local school.

Summary of Presentations

The researchers and educators who made presentations to the Commission provided insight and expertise on the issues of school success, high school completion and keeping students on-track to graduate. The Commission began its work with the intention of hearing from experts in the field who could help shape the findings and recommendations of the group. The members also wanted to learn more about the current practices in traditional high schools and in alternative programs that were most effective in assuring student success. The charge of the Commission included a call to examine the wide range of factors and practices that impact educational attainment. The presentation by staff from the State Board of Education and a follow-up report from ISBE clarified many of the questions that members had on how data are collected from schools and how the graduation rate is calculated for federal reporting. This also confirmed for the Commission members that it is essential to have clear and consistent definitions and guidelines when collecting data so that all schools track students and report on attendance and academic progress in a similar manner.

The on-going research of the Consortium on Chicago School Research provided the Commission with salient information on the key indicators and factors that predict student success. The findings in the Consortium's research and in the on-going research presented by Robert Balfanz are the basis for many of the recommendations that are outlined in the next section of this report. The research clearly shows the schools can identify those students who are at-risk of dropping out. If schools closely monitor the attendance patterns and course performance of its freshmen students, they can find clear signals when students are disengaged and struggling to keep up with their coursework. The research does recognize the importance of the student's experiences from birth to eighth grade in achieving academic success, but it is critically important to keep the student on-track when he or she first enters high school. These factors are the best predictors of graduation and it is critical that schools monitor these early warning signs and develop effective ways to intervene.

The educators and student who shared their experiences with the Commission provided practical information and ideas on what works for those students who are still in school and those who have dropped out. The principals outlined practices and policies that they use to keep students engaged and committed to finishing high school.

Recommendations of the Commission

The Commission on High School Graduation Achievement and Success believes that Illinois must do more to engage high school students in order to help keep them in school. Commission members recognize that it will require a multi-layered effort to achieve this goal. Students are more likely to remain in school and benefit from their education when there are programs and support systems that are designed to help the students attain their college and career goals. The recommendations of the Commission reflect the overall belief that early identification of high risk students and strengthening student support are most important to assuring that all students successfully complete high school. Students understand that a high school diploma is essential. Students who miss school or dropout often complain that they are unmotivated, bored or unsupported. They are unable to find the right person or the right program to make school meaningful.

Most students want to remain in school – but there is work that must be done to find meaningful interventions to keep students enrolled. We must identify the students who are most at-risk and redirect efforts to keep them from dropping out. For those who do leave school, we need alternative routes to success that provide options for these students to fulfill the requirements for a high school diploma. Students who are at-risk need encouragement, validation and support. It might come from a person who connects with them at school or it might come from an opportunity that opens their eyes to new options beyond high school. School interventions need to include better ways to engage students within the traditional classroom or offering alternative solutions that are conducted outside of the traditional school. Districts often develop truancy programs or alternative programs that are designed to provide alternative options for students who are having difficulty in school. Whether the intervention takes place in or outside of the traditional school, there are characteristics of these efforts that can help ensure success with students. Supportive intervention programs are most effective when they operate with lower student/teacher ratios; when they are able to create a safe school climate for students; when they are able to engage parents and families in their programs; when they can successfully combine academic and work-based learning; and when they set high expectations and maintain a student-centered environment.

Student support programs and alternative programs require resources to achieve results. Strong school programs with effective administrators and teachers need investment in order to succeed. We know that the State investment in programs that are designed to reduce or prevent students from dropping out has been cut significantly in recent years. We also know that research shows that there are clear long term socioeconomic benefits for our State if we do all that is possible to keep students enrolled and on-track to earn a diploma. Investment in programs that keep children in school have long term benefits for the fiscal and economic health of our State. The State must prioritize these investments to assure long term benefits. In addition to the costs of special support programs that serve students who dropout, there is the additional cost of per pupil funding at both the State and local level if we keep more students enrolled. During a period of fiscal constraints, it is a challenge at the State and local level when each additional student who is served is an immediate cost in their budgets. We must recognize

the costs that are associated with assuring that all of our students successfully complete high school and go on to pursue a post-secondary program that provides the skill and training for success in a 21st century career.

The recommendations that are included in this report reflect the strong commitment that Commission members have to achieving the overall goal that all students successfully complete high school. The recommendations reflect a desire to focus on student outcomes rather than specific programs. Schools need flexibility at the local level to provide programs and strategies that work best in their school setting and that take into account the specific needs of individual students. The Commission does recognize the need for consistency in defining and measuring outcomes for students. The ongoing development of the longitudinal student database affords an opportunity to develop clear and precise definitions for student measures and characteristics. Commission members also support coordinated efforts at the district, regional and State level to assure the most effective use of our limited resources and to avoid duplication of effort.

Recommendation 1: Each high school needs to maintain a Freshman On-Track data system that allows schools to identify students who are at risk of dropping out and to intervene with effective student-centered support.

- The Freshman On-track indicator is a measure of progress that teachers and schools leaders can use as an early warning system during the students' first year to help reduce chronic truancy and provide help to students who are failing academically.
- Different levels of intervention and action can be used to ensure that the right level of support is directed toward specific groups of students. The Commission identified a three-tiered approach for supporting students based on their level of disengagement in school. The three tiers include: students who have already dropped out and need intensive support to encourage them to return to school; students who are borderline and may already be considering leaving school; and students who are losing interest but have not yet given up on school.
- A high-quality, timely data system requires that schools have the tools and the technology to track student attendance, course performance and course completions. There must be precise data definitions and measures that are recorded in a timely and consistent manner to make this data useful to teachers and counselors. Technical resources are also required to develop and deliver useful information to teachers in the classroom.
- Schools must also have provisions for the timely and consistent sharing of data with teachers, counselors and partners. Teachers, staff and partners need timely feedback on student progress as measured against the on-track indicators.

- Keeping students on-track requires effort beyond the work of the classroom teacher. School administrators, counselors and social workers need to be aware of and engaged in the on-going intervention to keep high-risk students enrolled and attending school.
- School staff must also be aware that the on-track predictors apply to special need students and English Language Learners. Students in all programs can benefit from on-track monitoring and need to be included in the interventions that the school devises to keep students engaged.
- Schools need to engage parents and families in this effort to keep students on-track. Parents should understand that attendance is critical to success for their student. They need to be aware that the student's lack of progress in the classroom and chronic truancy means that they are much less likely to graduate.
- Schools should ensure that parents and community members have a thorough understanding of data reporting and performance measures and know where they can access this information.
- State and regional efforts, that include appropriate funding levels, can support activities at all three levels of intervention but they can most specifically address the needs of those students in the first tier who require the highest level of intervention and who will likely need alternative options to continue their education.
- The State should disseminate clear definitions, data elements and technical support for schools so that all schools and districts understand and use freshmen on-track data. Definitions for chronic truancy and for dropouts must be clear and precise in order to monitor student progress. In addition, schools must have guidelines on how and when to clean rolls.
- The State Board of Education and the State school management associations should develop and provide sample policies to local boards and districts that outline the key elements for a freshmen on-track system.
- The State should support school districts in the development of comprehensive and detailed training for staff who record data on student attendance and student performance. Training should include guidelines and directions for reporting student data in order to ensure accuracy and consistency across the State.
- Guidelines for monitoring student on-track status should include clear directions on how to identify and track those students who register and enroll days or weeks after the start of the school year.

Recommendation 2: School districts should provide opportunities for teachers, school leaders, school counselors and other staff to collaborate and engage in professional development that leads to greater student participation and success.

- School districts can only keep students on-track if there is a firm commitment to provide teachers and staff with the time, data and resources necessary to take action when intervention is required.
- Districts need to provide time, training and support to teachers at all grade levels so that they are able to identify the factors that indicate a student is at risk. Teachers and school counselors, social workers and school psychologists require training and professional development that includes proven, quality techniques and strategies to provide meaningful intervention for students.
- Teachers and school professionals need time to collaborate on plans of action and to assess the progress of a student once the additional support is provided.
- The State needs to support districts with resources that can help to address the problems of truants and dropouts. School districts require sufficient funding support that will allow for a reasonable ratio of students to counselors and that recognizes the value of professional support that school counselors and social workers provide to students.
- The State can assist districts in the development of school plans to address the problems of truancy, suspensions and dropouts. Plans should include strategies on how schools can use resources to help teachers and staff members implement strategies to reduce behavior and attendance problems. For schools with significant numbers of students who are chronically absent or that have very high dropout rates, schools might choose to identify a full-time coordinator to direct these efforts.
- The State can develop a policy audit that helps schools and school boards review policies related to school attendance, behavior and course completion to assure consistency and fairness. Policies should be reviewed to determine whether they support or undermine student completion.
- State and district efforts that support data system development should focus on delivering timely and useful information on student progress to teachers and counselors so that they can implement strategies that keep students in school and on the path to graduate.
- The State can provide guidance to schools and teachers on the most important measures and the best strategies that schools can use when they identify a student at-risk.

Recommendation 3: The State must develop and implement policies that are supported by research and longitudinal data and that will help to reduce chronic truancy and the dropout rate.

- Research shows that early intervention is the most effective way to reduce truancy and dropout rates at the high school level. High quality early learning programs for the most at-risk children can effectively reduce the number of dropouts in Illinois. State policies should be directed toward serving high-need young children in our best pre-school and child care programs.
- The State must provide mechanisms and develop policies that allow elementary schools to monitor and address chronic truancy. Children who miss school continue to fall further behind and will find it more difficult to catch up in coursework. The State should define key transition points and key metrics for schools to monitor. These measures will help schools determine if they are making the kinds of improvements that keep students on track in the early grades.
- For those children and their families who are most at-risk, the State must also seek ways to address the social, economic and emotional needs of children in order to help them stay in school. State and federal agencies need to better coordinate their resources and programs so that schools can address the range of problems that children face.
- School climate is an essential element in providing the atmosphere where students can learn and feel safe. State policy should support districts as they seek ways to assure a safe and healthy environment for their students.
- State policy and budget priorities can help to identify and define the type of support that is needed outside the classroom. Efforts to reduce truancy require designated resources. Truant officers, school counselors and social workers can provide the additional support that is needed to assist the student and family – and that also allows the teacher more time to focus on the academic help that students need.
- The State should be a conduit to districts and schools for information on best practices and effective strategies to keep students in school. The on-going work of the Center for School Improvement at the State Board and other State initiatives can be essential parts in helping schools identify the most effective ways to keep students on track and on the path to school success.
- The State must ensure that the longitudinal data system (ILDS) provides timely and useful information so that school districts can measure the effectiveness of their efforts and so that districts have comparative data that helps to inform their practice.
- As the State continues to develop new technologies, the State must maintain a commitment to utilizing these resources in support of early detection and in providing teachers with effective tools and resources to help children who are at-risk. The new Illinois Shared Learning Environment could be a powerful tool for teachers who seek to provide students who need additional academic support with the latest learning tools and resources.
- New State technology resources and data from new student assessments must provide teachers in the classroom and school leaders with timely information that can guide student learning.

Recommendation 4: The State and local school districts must support collaborative efforts with parents, families, businesses, higher education and community groups that keep students engaged in school and on-track for graduation.

- Families, businesses and community groups need to be engaged as part of the solution to keep students enrolled in school. These groups also provide potential resources and support for learning and intervention strategies.
- This broad system of engagement is essential if the State hopes to achieve the primary education goal adopted and promoted by the P-20 Council. **Illinois must increase the proportion of adults with high quality degrees or credentials to 60% by 2025.**
- One of the most effective strategies for early intervention is linking the student with a responsible adult who can reinforce the connection to school. Schools can encourage parents to talk with their children about the importance of school but not all parents will be successful in this effort. Students can be connected to other adult mentors who live or work in the community and who can help students surmount obstacles that prevent them from graduating.
- Schools in high poverty areas often have higher rates of truancy and larger numbers of students who dropout. There is often greater need in these districts to coordinate the school effort with the work that is done by community agencies. Support can be enlisted from social service agencies, mental health programs, childcare programs, after school programs and transportation agencies to help address the needs of students and families beyond the support that they require in the classroom. These efforts might need to be coordinated by a full-time person.
- Community groups and businesses can be engaged to help change the climate and culture of a school. Strong community support for high learning expectations and a culture of success in the schools can have an impact on the operations and performance at the school. Engaging students in community organizations and activities can also reinforce the importance of student success.
- Business partnerships are particularly important when schools want to offer students meaningful opportunities to develop work skills and attain credentials that prepare them for successful careers. Students need to see multiple pathways through their education that lead to career skills and job opportunities.
- Business partnerships allow opportunities for internships and coop experiences. Students can be engaged in project-based learning that translates to real-world skills. The State Pathways Initiative and STEM learning exchanges are designed to extend opportunities to students during their high school career. It is critical to extend these opportunities to students who are at-risk and who need this connection to the workplace to see the value of staying in school.

- Schools should provide options for flexible schedules that allow students to combine classes and quality work opportunities to keep them on-track to complete. Work opportunities should be clearly tied to academic instruction and should further the career goals of the student.
- Local schools should also engage in joint programs with local colleges and universities to extend the pathways for their students. Dual credit and dual enrollment programs allow student to complete credentials for skilled positions even while they are in high school. They also provide students with the chance to accrue college credit and shorten their time in college if they pursue a degree.
- Partnerships between colleges and high schools can also align their curriculum and academic programs with college level expectations. This can help assure that students who graduate from high school are college and career ready – without need for further remediation at the college level.
- Schools should consider alternative options for students who have already dropped out of school or who are off-track for graduation that allow for creativity and flexibility in serving these students. Students might need more time to complete and creative strategies for credit recovery in school. Better options for on-line learning and virtual courses might provide more opportunities for these students to receive a high school diploma.

Recommendation 5: The State must identify and prioritize the cost of monitoring students and the cost and effectiveness of intervention strategies. Illinois must commit the resources that are necessary to assure that all students finish high school ready to succeed in college and careers.

- The State does not currently have the resources or the capacity to implement effective intervention strategies or to provide options and alternatives to serve all of the current dropouts and students who are at risk of dropping out.
- The State must fund schools at the appropriate level if school districts are to be held accountable for student achievement and success.
- School districts require resources that allow them to invest in high-quality extended learning time; intensive academic supports; ninth grade intervention and transition strategies; strong language acquisition programs for English language learners; supportive mentoring; and developing and maintaining student data systems.
- The State must restore the funding for the Truant Alternative Optional Education Program and the Regional Safe School Program. Both had previously been funded at \$18 million dollars. Restoration to level funding allows the State to serve an additional 35,000 truant

students and the safe school programs to serve an additional 2,500 students who are suspended or expelled from local schools.

- The State must assure that there are an adequate number of seats or slots available for students who drop out. Students can be served through the expansion of current programs and through the further development of alternative high school programs that are dedicated to re-enrolling students who have already left school. In both of these options, the State needs to explore the potential for serving students through on-line courses and virtual high school programs, when these programs are proven to provide a quality education that will result in college, career or workforce ready.
- These resources and programs must also include over-age students who face significant challenges in returning to school. Students need to believe that the return to school at 18 or 19 is still a valuable investment in their future. There must be intentional efforts and well-designed programs to serve those students who are beyond the standard age for grade.
- The State should support the full implementation of the Illinois Hope and Opportunity Pathways through Education program (IHOPE). The program was established almost four years ago but has never been funded. The State requested \$25 million dollars to support the program in the original Race to the Top application but was unsuccessful in getting funds. IHOPE is designed to serve high-risk, out-of-school students from across the State who need direction and support in returning to school.

Conclusion

Achieving success in high school is a critical social, economic and educational issue for our State and our nation, as well as for our students who seek to be well-prepared for the jobs of the 21st century. The Commission recognizes that there is no single answer in determining how to assure that all students succeed and graduate. The recommendations of the Commission reflect the best thinking and the best practices of researchers, educators and students on how to improve our overall graduation rates and to assure that students who graduate are college and career ready. There is strong evidence that schools that identify students-at-risk at an early stage in their high school career can have a significant impact on retaining and graduating those students. Early intervention to prevent chronic truancy and to prevent academic failure during the freshman year increases the likelihood that the student will graduate. The drop out problem is complex and the causes for dropping out are many and difficult. The family, the neighborhood and the personal problems of the students are often beyond the control of teachers and school staff. The school environment and academic intervention are two areas, however, where teachers and support professionals can make a difference for the student. For this reason, the Commission has identified the freshmen on-track measure as the key factor in improving the outcome and academic success for students.

Students are more likely to remain on track and succeed in school when they see their academic work as meaningful and relevant to their future. They are also more likely to be engaged when they establish good relationships with their teachers, school counselors and their peers. Both the local schools and the State have a shared responsibility to assure that the policies and practices that impact student success are consistent, relevant, rigorous and coherent. Illinois can only hope to achieve success for all students when there is a committed effort to provide the resources that are needed for students to succeed at each stage of their education. This effort begins in early childhood and continues through college and beyond. It is the most critical investment that the State can make to assure the vibrancy and vitality of its social and economic future.

Appendices

Appendix I – Senate Bill 3259.....Page 24

Appendix II – List of Presenters.....Page 29

Appendix III – 2010/2011 Cohort Graduation Rates.....Page 30

Appendix IV – Graduation Rate Statistics.....Page 31

Appendix V – List of Reports and Resources.....Page 35

Appendix I

Senate Bill 3259 Enrolled

LRB097 19781 AMC 65047 b

1 AN ACT concerning education.

2 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,**
3 **represented in the General Assembly:**

4 Section 5. The School Code is amended by adding Section
5 26-17 as follows:

6 (105 ILCS 5/26-17 new)

7 (Section scheduled to be repealed on November 2, 2012)

8 Sec. 26-17. The Commission for High School Graduation
9 Achievement and Success.

10 (a) The General Assembly recognizes that the compulsory
11 school age is one piece of the education spectrum. There is a
12 great need to help children succeed in school and reach high
13 school graduation. The Commission for High School Graduation
14 Achievement and Success is hereby created to study the issue of
15 high school graduation in this State, with the goals of
16 increasing educational attainment, increasing high school
17 graduation rates, and ultimately improving the workforce in
18 this State. The Commission is tasked to examine and evaluate
19 the following:

20 (1) graduation rates in this State;

21 (2) this State's mandatory attendance age;

22 (3) alternative educational programs currently being

23 used in this State, including which are the most

1 successful, why they are successful, and whether they can
2 be used by other school districts in this State;
3 (4) the funding structures and options for these
4 alternative programs;
5 (5) alternative educational programs being used in
6 other states and whether they would be successful in school
7 districts in this State; and
8 (6) the effect that high school graduation has upon the
9 job outlook for individuals.
10 (b) The alternative educational programs in this State that
11 are to be studied by the Commission under subsection (a) of
12 this Section shall include, but are not be limited to, the
13 following:
14 (1) alternative schools, regional safe schools,
15 truancy alternative programs, and dual credit/dual degree
16 programs;
17 (2) the Shared Learning Infrastructure, online
18 courses, and other technology alternatives;
19 (3) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
20 (STEM) Learning Exchanges;
21 (4) the Illinois Pathways Initiative;
22 (5) Accelerating Opportunity Grants; and
23 (6) the Truants' Alternative and Optional Education
24 Program.
25 (c) The President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House
26 of Representatives, the Minority Leader of the Senate, and the

1 Minority Leader of the House of Representatives shall each
2 appoint one member to the Commission. The State Superintendent
3 of Education shall appoint one representative from the State
4 Board of Education to the Commission. The Governor shall
5 appoint a chairperson of the Commission. In addition, the
6 Commission shall be comprised of the following members
7 appointed by the Governor within 30 days after the effective
8 date of this amendatory Act of the 97th General Assembly:
9 (1) one member appointed to represent intermediate
10 service centers;
11 (2) one member appointed to represent regional offices
12 of education;
13 (3) one representative of an association representing
14 suburban school districts;
15 (4) one representative of an association representing
16 large unit school districts;
17 (5) one representative of a statewide association
18 representing school boards;
19 (6) one representative of a statewide association
20 representing principals;
21 (7) one representative of a statewide association
22 representing administrators;
23 (8) one representative of a statewide association
24 representing school business officials;
25 (9) one representative of an organization representing
26 an alternative education program;

1 (10) one representative of a statewide association
2 representing teachers;

3 (11) one representative of a different statewide
4 association representing teachers;

5 (12) one representative of an association representing
6 urban teachers;

7 (13) one member appointed to represent parents or a
8 parent organization;

9 (14) the chairperson of the Chicago Board of Education
10 or his or her designee; and

11 (15) the chairperson of the Illinois P-20 Council or
12 his or her designee.

13 Any additional members the Commission sees fit to appoint may
14 be done so by the chairperson of the Commission.

15 (d) The Commission may begin to conduct business upon the
16 appointment of a majority of voting members.

17 (e) The Office of the Governor, with help from the Illinois
18 P-20 Council and research provided by the State Board of
19 Education, shall provide administrative support to the
20 Commission.

21 (f) Members of the Commission shall receive no compensation
22 for their participation on the Commission.

23 (g) In addition to any other applicable laws and
24 administrative rules, all aspects of the Commission shall be
25 governed by the Freedom of Information Act, including
26 exemptions as provided in Section 7 of the Freedom of

1 Information Act, as well as the Open Meetings Act. This Section
2 shall not be construed so as to preclude other statutes from
3 applying to the Commission or its activities.

4 (h) The Commission shall submit a final report of its
5 findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General
6 Assembly on or before November 1, 2012. The Commission may
7 submit other reports as it deems appropriate.

8 (i) The Commission is abolished on November 2, 2012, and
9 this Section is repealed on November 2, 2012.

10 Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon
11 becoming law.

Appendix II

Presenters at Commission Meetings

October 19, 2012

Dr. Christopher Koch, Superintendent of the Illinois State Board of Education
Mike McKindles, Illinois State Board of Education

November 8, 2012

Elaine Allensworth, Interim Executive Director, University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research and the Managing Director of the Urban Education Institute

November 20, 2012

Dr. Robert Balfanz, Everyone Graduates Center, Johns Hopkins University
Keisha Davis-Johnson, Principal, West Town Academy
Brianna Johnson, Student, West Town Academy
Elizabeth Kirby, Network Chief, Chicago Public Schools
William Leavy, Executive Director, Greater West Town Community Development Project
Dr. Lazaro Lopez, Principal, Wheeling High School
Sheila Venson, Executive Director, Youth Connection Charter School

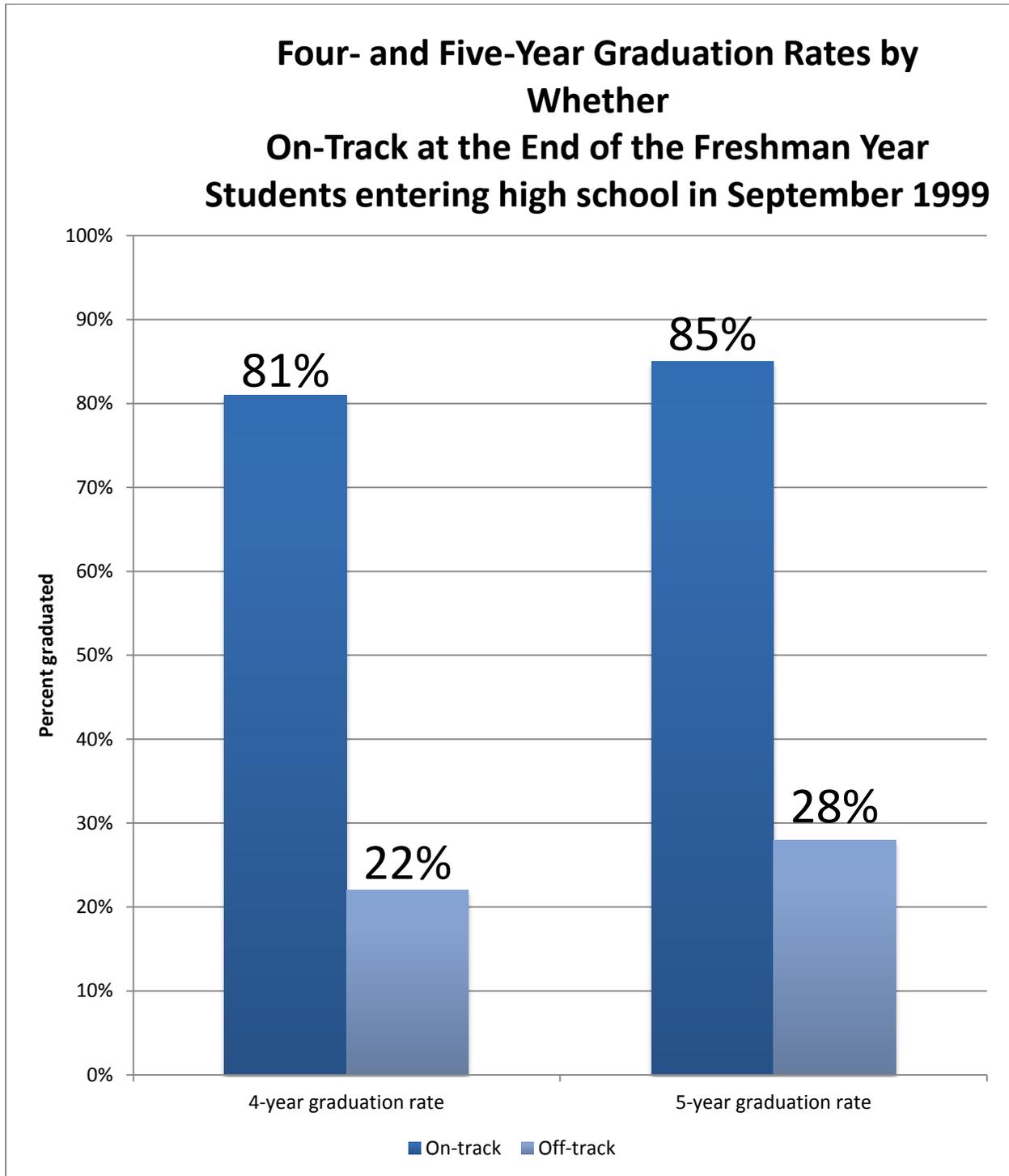
January 17, 2013

Kye Gaffey, Superintendent of Schools at the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice

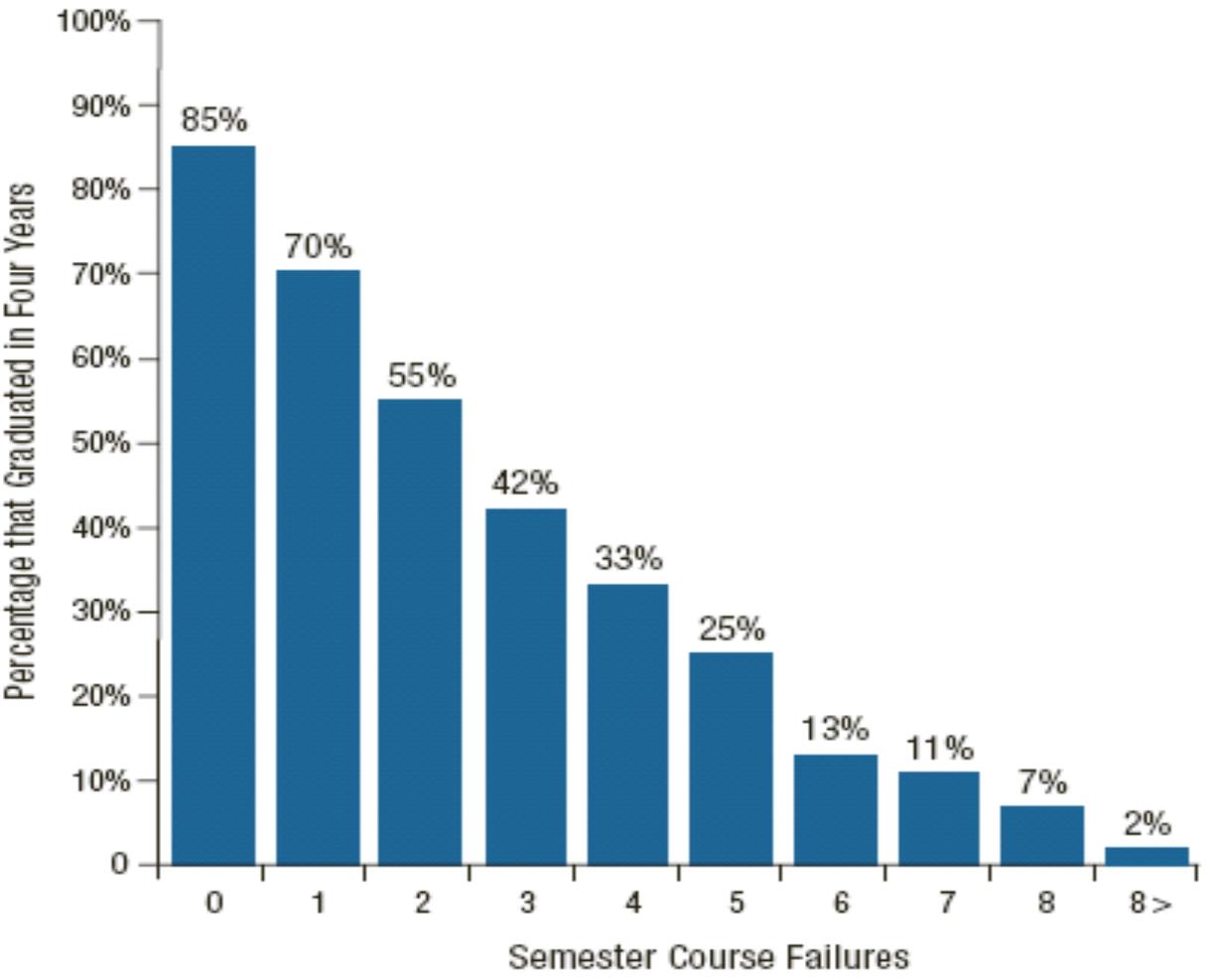
Appendix III - Provisional Data File: SY2010-11 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates

	Major Racial and Ethnic Groups							Special Populations		
	All Students	American Indian / Alaska Native or Native American	Asian / Pacific Islander	Black (not Hispanic) or African American	Hispanic / Latino	Multicultural or Multiethnic or Multiracial	White (not Hispanic) or Caucasian	Children with disabilities (IDEA)	Limited English proficient (LEP) Students	Economically Disadvantaged Students
ALABAMA	72%	80%	77%	63%	66%	-	78%	30%	36%	62%
ALASKA	68%	51%	74%	63%	62%	65%	75%	40%	41%	56%
ARIZONA	78%	62%	87%	74%	72%	-	85%	67%	25%	73%
ARKANSAS	81%	85%	75%	73%	77%	82%	84%	75%	76%	75%
BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION	61%	61%	-	-	-	-	-	56%	51%	61%
CALIFORNIA	76%	68%	89%	63%	70%	65%	85%	59%	60%	70%
COLORADO	74%	52%	81%	65%	60%	-	81%	53%	53%	62%
CONNECTICUT	83%	72%	92%	71%	64%	-	89%	61%	59%	62%
DELAWARE	78%	78%	90%	73%	71%	93%	82%	56%	65%	71%
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA	59%	‡	‡	58%	55%	-	85%	39%	53%	58%
FLORIDA	71%	70%	86%	59%	69%	-	76%	44%	53%	60%
GEORGIA	67%	68%	79%	60%	58%	69%	76%	30%	32%	59%
HAWAII	80%	60%	81%	77%	79%	-	78%	59%	60%	75%
IDAHO	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†
ILLINOIS	84%	78%	92%	74%	77%	81%	89%	66%	68%	75%
INDIANA	86%	76%	88%	75%	81%	80%	88%	65%	73%	79%
IOWA	88%	79%	88%	73%	75%	82%	90%	70%	70%	78%
KANSAS	83%	72%	88%	72%	73%	81%	86%	73%	70%	73%
KENTUCKY	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†
LOUISIANA	71%	71%	84%	64%	70%	80%	77%	29%	43%	64%
MAINE	84%	82%	90%	77%	87%	86%	84%	66%	78%	73%
MARYLAND	83%	74%	93%	76%	72%	91%	89%	57%	54%	74%
MASSACHUSETTS	83%	76%	88%	71%	62%	81%	89%	66%	56%	70%
MICHIGAN	74%	62%	85%	57%	63%	69%	80%	52%	62%	63%
MINNESOTA	77%	42%	72%	49%	51%	-	84%	56%	52%	58%
MISSISSIPPI	75%	76%	89%	68%	75%	-	82%	23%	67%	69%
MISSOURI	81%	77%	87%	66%	75%	92%	85%	68%	62%	74%
MONTANA	82%	63%	88%	81%	78%	-	85%	69%	57%	71%
NEBRASKA	86%	64%	83%	70%	74%	-	90%	70%	52%	78%
NEVADA	62%	52%	74%	43%	53%	80%	71%	23%	29%	53%
NEW HAMPSHIRE	86%	78%	87%	73%	73%	86%	87%	69%	73%	72%
NEW JERSEY	83%	87%	93%	69%	73%	84%	90%	73%	68%	71%
NEW MEXICO	63%	56%	78%	60%	59%	-	73%	47%	56%	56%
NEW YORK	77%	64%	86%	64%	63%	79%	86%	48%	46%	69%
NORTH CAROLINA	78%	70%	87%	72%	69%	77%	83%	57%	48%	71%
NORTH DAKOTA	86%	62%	88%	74%	76%	-	90%	67%	61%	76%
OHIO	80%	71%	88%	59%	66%	71%	85%	67%	53%	65%
OKLAHOMA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OREGON	68%	52%	78%	54%	58%	73%	70%	42%	52%	61%
PENNSYLVANIA	83%	77%	88%	65%	65%	75%	88%	71%	63%	71%
PUERTO RICO	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†	†
RHODE ISLAND	77%	66%	75%	67%	67%	77%	82%	58%	68%	66%
SOUTH CAROLINA	74%	67%	84%	70%	69%	-	77%	39%	62%	67%
SOUTH DAKOTA	83%	49%	45%	73%	73%	87%	88%	84%	82%	86%
TENNESSEE	86%	89%	91%	78%	79%	-	89%	67%	71%	80%
TEXAS	86%	87%	95%	81%	82%	92%	92%	77%	58%	84%
UTAH	76%	57%	72%	61%	57%	-	80%	59%	45%	65%
VERMONT	87%	-	-	-	-	-	-	69%	82%	77%
VIRGINIA	82%	-	-	73%	71%	-	86%	47%	55%	70%
WASHINGTON	76%	57%	81%	65%	63%	73%	79%	56%	51%	66%
WEST VIRGINIA	76%	‡	91%	72%	71%	‡	77%	57%	79%	68%
WISCONSIN	87%	75%	89%	64%	72%	-	91%	67%	66%	74%
WYOMING	80%	51%	87%	58%	74%	77%	82%	57%	62%	66%

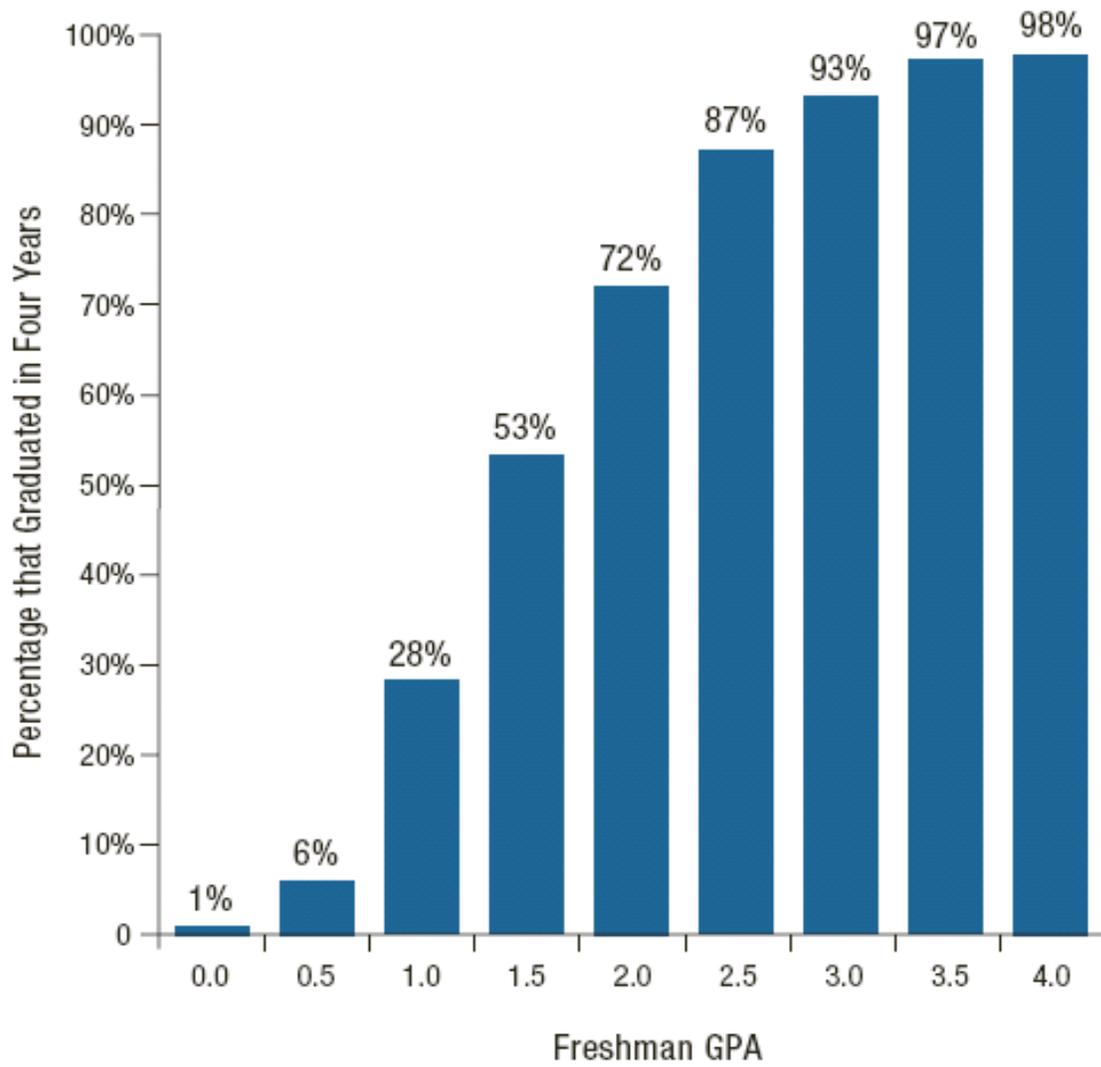
Appendix IV



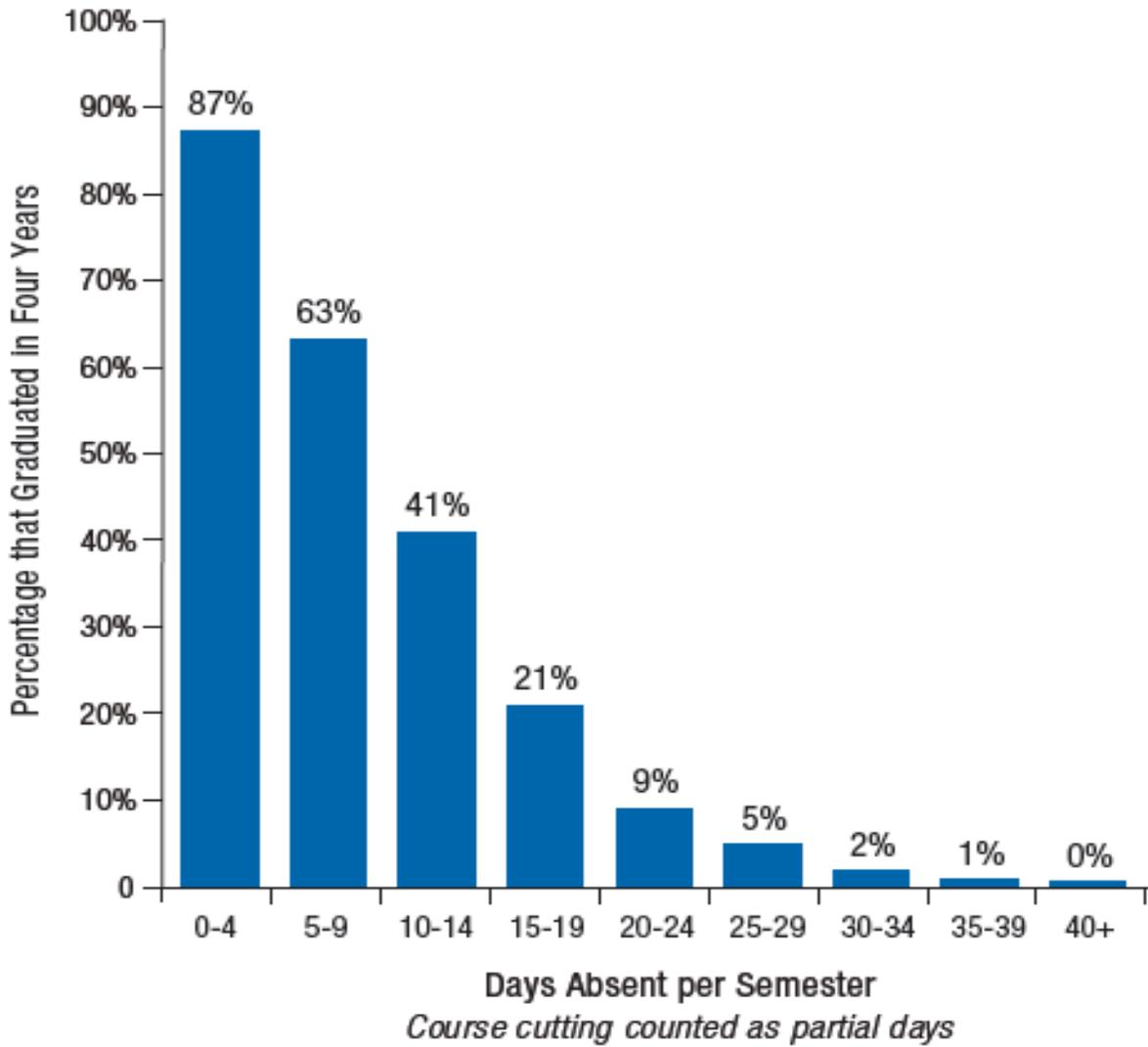
Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman Course Failures



Four-Year Graduation Rates by Freshman GPA



Four-Year Graduation Rates by Days Absent Per Semester



Appendix V

National Reports and Resources

Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts, by Jessica B. Heppen and Susan Bowles Therriault, National High School Center, July 2008.

http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/IssueBrief_EarlyWarningSystemsGuide.pdf

Dropout Prevention, by William Mathis, National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado-Boulder, January 2013.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/NEPC%20Dropouts.pdf>

Dropouts, *Education Week*, June 16, 2011.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Dropout%20Article%20-%20Ed%20Week%20October%202011.pdf>

ESEA Flexibility and Graduation Rates, the U.S. Department of Education, 2012.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/ESEA%20Flexibility%20and%20Graduation%20Rates.pdf>

Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009–10, by Jennifer Sable, Education Statistics Services Institute–American Institutes for Research and Robert Stillwell, National Center for Education Statistics, January 2013.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Public%20School%20Graduates%20and%20Dropouts%20Common%20Core%20Data%2009-10.pdf>

SY2010-11 Four-Year Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rates, U.S. Department of Education.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/2010-11%20Four-Year%20Regulatory%20Adjusted%20Cohort%20Graduation%20Rates.pdf>

Technical Issues Underlying Dropout and Completion Indicators, by Elaine Allensworth, Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, Prepared for the National Academies Committee for Improved Measurement of High School Dropout and Completion Rates, November 13, 2012.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Tech%20issues%20in%20dropout%20calculations%20-%20Allensworth.pdf>

A Uniform, Comparable Graduation Rate: How the final regulations for Title I hold schools, districts, and states accountable for improving graduation rates, from the Department of Education, 2008.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/DOE%20NGA%20Uniform%20Grad%20Rate.pdf>

Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity, by KIDS COUNT, a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Youth%20and%20Work%20policy%20report.pdf>

Illinois Reports and Resources

A Challenge Unmet: Students with emotional or learning disabilities are entitled to an education. But in Chicago, they often miss weeks of school, more than other children, by David Jackson and Gary Marx, *The Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 2012.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/A%20challenge%20unmet%20-%20chicagotribune.pdf>

Developing Five Multi-Site Charter Schools in Chicago to Re-Enroll 12,000 High School Dropouts,

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Charter%20Schools%20for%20Dropouts%20Report.pdf>

Final Report: Re-enrolling Students Who Dropped Out of School, by the Illinois Task Force on Re-enrolling Students Who Dropped out of School, January 10, 2008.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Task%20Force%20Executive%20Summary%20and%20Report%2010-19-12.pdf>

Greater West Town Community Development Project Position Letter, by William J. Leavy, Executive Director of the Greater West Town Community Development Project and Keisha Davis-Johnson, Principal of West Town Academy, November 20, 2012.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Greater%20West%20Town%20Community%20Development%20Background%20and%20Recommendations.pdf>

Illinois and Chicago Dropout and Truancy Trends provided by Commissioner Jack Wuest

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Illinois%20and%20Chicago%20Dropout%20and%20Truancy%20Trends.pdf>

Illinois Funding for Re-Enrollment Programs provided by Commissioner Jack Wuest

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Illinois%20Funding%20for%20Re-Enrollment%20Programs.pdf>

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A Close Look at Course Grades, Failures, and Attendance in the Freshman Year by Elaine M. Allensworth and John Q. Easton, July 2007, Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/What%20Matters%20for%20Staying%20On%20Track.pdf>

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A Focus on Students with Disabilities by Elaine M. Allensworth, Julia Gwynne, Holly M. Hart and Joy Lesnick, December 2009, Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/CCSRSpecialEdWMS.pdf>

What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A Focus on English Language Learners by Elaine M. Allensworth, Stacy Ehrlich, Julia Gwynne and Amber Stitzel Pareja, May 2012, Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago.

http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/UChicagoCCSR_NHSC_ELLEWS_May12.pdf

Commission Reports and Resources

Commissioner Recommendations – Mark McDonald, Superintendent of Schools for Community High School District 99

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20Commissioner%20Mark%20McDonald.pdf>

Commissioner Recommendations (Updated) – Mark McDonald, Superintendent of Schools for Community High School District 99

[http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20Commissioner%20Mark%20McDonald%20\(Update%2012.21\).pdf](http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20Commissioner%20Mark%20McDonald%20(Update%2012.21).pdf)

Commissioner Recommendations – Melissa Mitchell, Executive Director of the Federation for Community Schools

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20Commissioner%20Melissa%20Mitchell.pdf>

Commissioner Recommendations – Candace Mueller, Illinois Association of School Boards

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20IASB.pdf>

Commissioner Recommendations – Jane Russell, Executive Board Vice President, Illinois Federation of Teachers, Stacy Davis-Gates, Legislative Director, Chicago Teachers Union, Al Llorens, Secretary-Treasurer, Illinois Educations Association, Audrey Soglin, Executive Director, Illinois Education Association, Kathy Shaevel, Union Professional Issues Director, Illinois Federation of Teachers

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Memo%20IFT%20CTU%20recommendations%20FINAL%201-22-2013.pdf>

Commissioner Recommendations – Julie Wollerman, Regional Superintendent of Schools (ROE #3)

[http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Commission%20Points%20to%20offer%20\(2\).pdf](http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Commission%20Points%20to%20offer%20(2).pdf)

Commissioner Recommendations – Jack Wuest, Executive Director of the Alternative Schools Network

<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20Commissioner%20Jack%20Wuest.pdf>

Commissioner Recommendations – Vic Zimmerman, Superintendent of Schools, Monticello CUSD #25
<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/Recommendations%20-%20Commissioner%20Vic%20Zimmerman.pdf>

Illinois State Board of Education Responses to Commissioner Inquiries, December 11, 2012
<http://www2.illinois.gov/gov/P20/Documents/High%20School%20Graduation%20Achievement%20and%20Success/ISBE%20Responses%20to%20Commission%20Inquiries.pdf>

