Education in Illinois
The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly
Below is a survey of the state of education in Illinois:

**The Good**

**Standards** – In 2010, Illinois’s English language arts (ELA) and math standards both received a D from the national Thomas B. Fordham Institute. On June 24, 2010, the Illinois State Board of Education adopted the rigorous Common Core State Standards in ELA and math for grades K–12. These new standards received a B+ and an A- for ELA and math, respectively, from the Fordham Institute. Mastery of these standards will help ensure that Illinois students are prepared for success in college and the workforce.

**Data System** – Illinois’s state longitudinal data system contains eight of the ten core elements that the Data Quality Campaign deems essential. However, Illinois must work to develop a teacher identifier system with the ability to match teachers to students as well as publicly report student-level course completion (transcript) data. Illinois must also work to maximize use of data capacity in driving effective decision making to improve system and student performance.

**Return on Investment** – Student achievement in Illinois is solid relative to state spending on education according to the 2007 national Leaders and Laggards report. Illinois received a B and ranked 16th among all states for its return on investment, which was measured by its students’ performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—an independent measuring stick also known as the Nation’s Report Card—relative to its per-pupil spending ($6,966, after controlling for student poverty, the percentage of students with special needs, and cost of living).

**The Bad**

**Teacher Policies** – In its 2009 State Teacher Policy Yearbook, the National Council on Teacher Quality gave the state of Illinois an overall D+ for state policies focused on teachers.

Specifically, the state received grades on its ability to perform in the following areas:

- Delivering well-prepared teachers: D
- Expanding the pool of teachers: D+
- Identifying effective teachers: D
- Retaining effective teachers: D
- Exiting ineffective teachers: B-

However, Illinois has since enacted legislation requiring that the use of data and indicators of student growth be “significant” factors in teacher evaluations, and that teachers must be rated as: “excellent,” “proficient,” “needs improvement,” or “unsatisfactory.”

**Charter School Laws** – According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ 2011 ranking of state charter school laws, Illinois’s public charter school law is ranked 30th in the nation. Illinois law contains a limit of 120 charter schools, with a maximum of 75 in Chicago and 45 in the rest of the state. While the law allows a variety of public charter school options, including new start-ups, public school conversions, and virtual schools, Illinois must expand authorizer options for applicants, strengthen quality control measures, and ensure equitable funding and access to facilities. For the 2010-11 school year, Illinois has 45,000 students attending public charter schools, which provide needed educational options for families.
Graduation Rate – Illinois reports an 86% graduation rate, but the national Diplomas Count report calculates a rate of 75%. Below is the percentage of students graduating in 2007 in Illinois as compared to the United States.

Student Achievement – Like many other states, Illinois paints a misleading picture of how well its students are performing. While the state reports proficiency rates of 82% or higher for 4th and 8th graders in math, NAEP reveals a 38% or lower proficiency rate for both grades.
**Achievement Gap** – Not only is the state performing insufficiently overall, but some groups of students are faring even worse. There is more than a 30-point gap in scores between Illinois’s black and white students on 4th grade reading and math tests and 8th grade reading tests, and nearly a 40-point gap between black and white students on 8th grade math tests.\(^1\) This is morally unacceptable and a significant threat to continued prosperity and economic competitiveness in Illinois and the nation.

**Dropouts’ Effect on the Economy** – The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that the lost lifetime earnings in Illinois for the 2010 class of dropouts alone would total nearly $12 billion. If Illinois graduated all students ready for college, the state would save as much as $210 million a year in community college remediation costs and lost earnings. In addition, if the state increased its male high school graduation rate just 5%, Illinois’s economy would see a combination of crime-related savings and additional revenue of about $379 million each year.\(^2\) Significantly reducing dropouts each year would multiply these positive outcomes.

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**Endnotes**


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