

STATE OF ILLINOIS  
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

**SUMMARY AND REVIEW OF *MEASURING UP 2000*:  
*THE STATE-BY-STATE REPORT CARD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION***

Illinois is at the head of the class.

With grades any parent would be gratified to see, Illinois ranked first among the 50 states in *Measuring Up 2000*, the first-ever state-by-state report card to evaluate systems of higher education, developed and compiled by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

Illinois received A's in three of the six categories covered by the report card – preparation for college, participation in college, and affordability. According to the National Center, college-completion rates in Illinois warranted only a C+ on the report card, and the benefits derived by the state from higher education merited a B-. All states received an “incomplete” in the sixth category – student learning – because the National Center could find no reliable, comparable data to evaluate states.

Illinois' overall grade point average of 88.8 was slightly higher than Connecticut. The top 10 states were:

	<b>Average Scores</b>	<b>Grade</b>
1. Illinois	88.8	B+
2. Connecticut	88.2	B+
3. New Jersey	88.0	B+
4. Maryland	87.4	B+
5. Massachusetts	87.2	B+
6. Minnesota	86.8	B
7. Kansas	86.0	B
8. Wisconsin	85.4	B
8. Colorado	85.4	B
10. Delaware	85.0	B

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education is an independent policy research organization based in San Jose, California, and funded by foundation grants. Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center, wrote in *Measuring Up 2000* that the report card project was propelled by the twin beliefs that higher education has become “virtually the only gateway to fully participate in our nation's prosperous economic and civic life,” and that states have the primary role in shaping public policy in higher education. Callan says the report card, the product of a two-and-a-half-year process, is designed to give state leaders and policy-makers a tool for evaluating and comparing state performance in higher education on a variety of key results-oriented measures. States were graded by comparing their performance against the top-performing states in each category, thus producing an achievable “real world” standard.

The report card, while not flawless, presents higher education leaders and other state officials with a valuable policy-making mechanism. The report card is appropriately focused on

performance and presented in a readily understandable format, which makes it a useful measure of accountability. In turn, it highlights both strengths and weaknesses, enabling policy-makers to build on what's working and to fix deficiencies. Governor James B. Hunt, Chair of the National Center, notes in his foreword to the report card: "As a governor, I've learned that the things we keep track of, count, and monitor tend to be the ones we improve."

The National Center report notes that the grades are a compilation of various indicators that 1) are collected regularly by reliable, public sources, 2) can be compared across all states, and 3) measure performance results. Each indicator – for instance, high school completion rates, or percentage of working age adults enrolled in college – was weighted based on its importance to the performance category. State results were converted to a 100-point scale with the top five states serving as benchmarks – a yardstick considered achievable since at least some states are achieving it. Illinois was in the top benchmarks states in three of the five graded categories. The grading scale in each category is familiar to any college student: 90-100 equals an A; 80-89, a B; and so on.

Although Illinois higher education outperformed all states on the whole, the individual grades were more a mixture of good news and bad news, pluses and minuses regardless of the performance measure. For example, in **preparation**, the key indicators were high school completion; K-12 course-taking patterns, including the percentage of high school students taking upper-level math and science courses and eighth graders taking algebra; and K-12 student achievement. Illinois ranked high in high school completion and scores on college entrance exams. But data were not available on K-12 course-taking and achievement because Illinois did not participate in national surveys and assessments used for the report card, a deficiency which has recently been corrected by the State Board of Education. Eight states got A's in preparation.

Grades in **participation** were based on the percentage of young adults and working-age adults enrolled in higher education. Illinois fares well in both age groups, and overall placed second (to Delaware) in this category. The National Center pointed out that a tiny proportion of working adults go to college, ranging from 6.3 percent in Delaware to 1.9 percent in Montana; the average of the top-performing states at 4.7 percent, the same as Illinois. Seven states received A's in participation in college.

### PREPARATION

A

- ✦ Illinois is the leading state in proportion of high school students scoring well on college entrance exams.
- ✦ 87% of 18-24-year-olds have a high school credential.
- Only 62% of young adults from low-income families have a high school credential, compared to 97% of those from high-income families.
- Just over half of students who take the ACT say they have taken the BHE-recommended core college-prep curriculum.

### PARTICIPATION

A

- ✦ 49% of high school freshmen enroll in college within four years, compared to 54% in the top states.
- ✦ 35% of young adults (18-24) enroll in college, compared to 42% in top states.
- ✦ 4.7% of working-age adults (25-44) enroll part time in college, the same as the average of top states.
- There is an income gap in college enrollments: more than half of young adults from high-income families go to college, while just one in five from low-income families are college students.

The report card graded **affordability** based on the ability of families to pay tuition at colleges and universities (public and private), the level of financial aid, and reliance on loans to finance college expenses. Illinois fares well in this category, fourth overall. Just five states received A's in affordability, and the report card noted: "State investment in financial aid for low-income students is fairly low for most states. Only eight states provide aid at 70 percent or more of the level provided in the best performing states." Five states received A's in affordability.

Illinois' lowest grade was in was in the college **completion** category, which evaluated states on persistence – freshmen students returning for their sophomore year – and on degree completion. Illinois was 29<sup>th</sup> overall in this category. Nationwide just over half of full-time, first-time freshmen at four-year colleges and universities earn a bachelor's degree within five years, according to the report card. The National Center also reported that many states, Illinois among them, have wide disparities in certificate and degree completion by ethnic background. Seven states got A's in college persistence and completion.

The report card measured the **benefits** derived from higher education on the basis of educational attainment (specifically, percent of adults holding a bachelor's degree), economic benefits (increase in personal income as a result of holding a bachelor's degree), civic benefits (measured by voting and charitable contributions), and adult literacy. Oregon was the only state where the percentage of the population holding a bachelor's degree did not increase over the past decade. Missouri had the largest increase, from 18 to 28 percent; Illinois went from 24 percent to 28 percent. Eight states got A's for the benefits derived from higher education; Illinois joined 16 other states with a B. West Virginia was the only state that flunked the benefits category.

Finally, the National Center decided to give all states an incomplete in student **learning**. "All states lack information on the educational performance of college students that would permit systematic state or national comparisons," the report card said. "Their Incomplete grades highlight a gap in our ability as a nation to say something meaningful about what students learn in college."

An essay by Peter Ewell, a senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, in the National Center's report and on the report card web site

A

**AFFORDABILITY**

- ✦ Illinois is the top performer in providing needs-based financial aid to low-income students.
- ✦ Illinois compares well with top-performing states in the share of family income, after financial aid, needed to attend community colleges and four-year public universities.
- Private institutions, which account for 30% of Illinois enrollments, require a large share of family income for students to attend.
- On average, Illinois students borrow \$4,171 a year for college expenses, compared to \$3,094 at top-performing states.

C+

**COMPLETION**

- ✦ 78% of Illinois freshmen at four-year colleges and universities return for their sophomore year; 84% do so in top-performing states.
- 55% of Illinois first-time, full-time students finish a bachelor's degree within five years, compared to 66% in the top-ranking states.
- 15 certificates, degrees, or diplomas are awarded for every 100 undergraduates in Illinois; 20 in the top-performing states.
- For every 100 Hispanic students enrolled in college in Illinois, 9 receive a degree or certificate, compared with 16 per every 100 white undergraduates.

(www.highereducation.org) examines the difficulty in finding common measures of student learning. Few states, he notes, administer a test to large numbers of students. States that test students often do so for different purposes: to evaluate learning, for example, or to examine and/or reward institutional performance. Sometimes, he adds, statewide tests apply to only one sector of higher education or one area of learning. These differences underscore a more fundamental barrier: There is no consensus on what to gauge or how.

Ewell identifies four factors that make the task tough: 1) Lack of agreement on “what the core outcomes of a college education ought to be”; 2) results of a college-level test often depend on skills a student brings to college; 3) the difficulty in creating a test that will adequately measure performance for college graduates; and 4) the challenge of getting college students to take such a test seriously.

Illinois has accepted these challenges with the mandate that students in all academic programs will be assessed by 2004, a function of Goal 5 of *The Illinois Commitment*, which states that colleges and universities will hold students to higher expectations and will be accountable for the quality of classroom learning.

There exists already in the national report card a powerful connection to the goals of *The Illinois Commitment*, the strategic plan adopted by the Board of Higher Education in February 1999. For example, the report card grades preparation for college, a direct link to Goal 2 of *The Illinois Commitment* calling for colleges and universities to join with K-12 education to improve teaching and learning at all levels. Participation in college relates to Goal 4 of *The Illinois Commitment* which concerns access to higher education and issues of diversity on campus. The affordability category of the report card has Goal 3 written all over it: No Illinois citizen will be denied an opportunity for a college education because of financial need. The completion category relates to Goals 2 (readiness for college) and 5 (quality of academic programs). The benefits grade touches several goals as well: 1, which promises to help business and industry sustain economic growth; 4, access to college and educational attainment; and 5, the quality of academic programs.

It is no accident that the performance categories of the national report card line up so consistently with the goals of *The Illinois Commitment* – both have been designed to address the public purposes of higher education in a fast-changing economic and social milieu. That connection should serve Illinois well as it seeks to sustain its honor roll rank on National Center report cards in 2002 and 2004.

But Illinois’ exemplary report card did not begin with *The Illinois Commitment*, which is, after all, not yet two years old. The seeds of success for higher education were planted long ago and nurtured for many years – decades, actually – by a succession of farsighted governors, legislators, and education leaders. Some historical milestones reflect the rich history, visionary

## **BENEFITS**

- ✦ 28% of the population, aged 25-65, have a bachelor’s degree, compared to 34% in the top-performing states.
- ✦ Illinois ranks well in adult high-level literacy skills.
- ✦ Nine of 10 Illinoisans who itemize their income taxes declare charitable gifts.
- Just 50% of eligible Illinois voters went to the polls in 1996 and 1998 national elections, compared to 60% in the top-performing states.
- If all ethnic groups had the same educational attainment and earnings as whites, Illinois’ total personal income would rise \$9.1 billion this year, and tax revenues would go up by \$3.2 billion.

leadership, and deep commitment that built a higher education system in Illinois that is, literally, second to none. Consider:

- **1957** – The Illinois State Scholarship Commission was established (renamed Illinois Student Assistance Commission in 1989).
- **1961** – The Board of Higher Education established as coordinating agency for colleges and universities.
- **1964** – IBHE submitted first phase of state Master Plan for higher education.
- **1965** – General Assembly established the Illinois Community College Board.
- **1969** – Illinois income tax enacted.
- **1989** – Income tax surcharge/Education Assistance Fund enacted.
- **1995** – Reorganization of higher education governance enacted.
- **1998-present** – Strong support by the Governor and General Assembly for technology initiatives and other improvements.
- **1999** – Board of Higher Education adopts *The Illinois Commitment* as strategic plan for higher education.
- Historically, strong leadership from presidents, chancellors, faculty, staff, students, board members, alumni, and other citizens of the state.

This historical perspective illustrates the long-standing commitment that has brought Illinois higher education to the pinnacle of success. But as any valedictorian will attest, there is no occasion to rest on one's laurels. The National Center report card, as well as the Statewide Results Report presented to the Board show many performance gaps that require immediate, sometimes urgent, attention. An A in preparation cannot be sustained without increasing the number of high school students who take the college prep core curriculum. The rising cost of college makes an A in affordability fragile in any state, even one blessed as Illinois is with an outstanding student financial aid program. An A in college participation will be satisfactory only when participation increases for minorities and other underrepresented groups. There clearly is work to do to ensure that more students who come in the front door of colleges and universities leave with a degree in hand.

*The Illinois Commitment* points the way to build on Illinois' strengths and shore up its weaknesses. Recommendations for steps needed to keep Illinois higher education on the honor roll will be presented to the Board in February. The Board, like a proud parent, will be gratified with Illinois' report card so long as it remains at the head of the class. After all, the best-performing state in the nation only received a GPA of B+.