

EDUCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The continuing vitality of the Chicago Metropolitan region depends on the quality of education available in our communities and institutions. Education is critical to the development of individuals and society, a process that begins at birth and lasts a lifetime. Effective education is key to sustaining a productive workforce, an engaged citizenry and a high quality of life.

Critical across the entire seven-county region is access to high quality learning opportunities for all residents, from very young children through adulthood. Although the northeastern counties of Illinois are home to many outstanding early childhood programs, elementary and secondary school districts, as well as institutions of higher learning, access to high quality education and successful completion of degree programs is unevenly distributed in the region. Working together across and within these institutions to envision and achieve access to excellent education in all our communities is indeed the major effort we must undertake.

The overarching educational issues the region confronts collectively reflect some of the exact same challenges faced nationally in education, including:

1. Raising significantly the quality of education to prepare our residents for successful lives in a 21st century global society as well as an information economy;
2. Strengthening our residents' access to all levels of education while also ensuring their readiness to succeed.

Preparing all institutions to provide excellent learning opportunities and to support the success of all individuals at all levels of education requires a systematic and strategic response to a number of pressing challenges. Among the more obvious challenges in the region and at the state level are:

- The lack of coordination among early childhood development and education programs, K-12 districts and higher education, which too often results in students not being ready to succeed as they advance from one level to the next;
- Preparation and development of educators for all levels of schooling that needs to be strengthened dramatically to enable teachers to address increasingly complex subject matter as well as diverse populations of students with increasingly diverse strengths and needs;
- A lack of coordinated data systems to track students' development and the impact of learning programs across all levels of education;
- Significant numbers of children who lack access to high-quality early childhood programs;

- Inequitable resources across elementary/secondary districts and inefficient governance systems;
- Focus of limited resources on narrowly defined academic skills at the expense of attending to comprehensive developmental needs of all children and youth, including social/emotional, physical, and artistic arenas of development;
- Escalating tuition costs that make college unaffordable for many;
- Achievement gaps among racial/ethnic and gender groups;
- Low rates of college completion for some groups of students, in particular African American and Latino;
- Students exiting post-secondary education without the skills or direction to find good employment.

VISION STATEMENT

- Educational opportunities and learning experiences available to all individuals in the seven-county region will be consistently excellent and enable all residents to achieve a high quality of life, meaningful engagement in society, and productive participation in the workforce. Institutions and agencies that provide education at all levels, moreover, will demonstrate new capacity to address the increasingly diverse strengths and needs of all students, in particular low-income and first generation participants.
- Numerous institutions are currently involved in education, from day care centers through institutions of higher education. The GOTO 2040 plan provides an opportunity to improve education at each of those levels as well to create links within and across institutions to effect seamless pathways for learning. Facilitating access to quality education and readiness for learning at each level of the various systems should result in more positive student and community outcomes.
- The region will respond to the State's P-20 challenge of developing local models of more coordination and alignment of education systems in an unprecedented way. The collaboration of institutions and agencies will thus better support the success of young children from birth through adulthood in learning at high levels and result in successful completion of postsecondary education and readiness to move into the workforce with high levels of skill and attainment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for addressing these persistent challenges and that focus on these overarching issues will require that educational institutions and communities work not only within their own levels (birth through pre-school, elementary-secondary, and post-secondary/higher education), but also across these levels in deliberate and intentional

ways. This summary presents key issues and selected recommendations for action in the region, not only at a comprehensive (P-20) level, but also at discrete levels of education.

RAISING QUALITY

Issue Number One is raising significantly the quality of education to prepare our residents for successful lives in a 21st century global society as well as an information economy .

P-20

1. The quality of education at all levels needs to be enhanced through the preparation and continuous development of an education workforce with deep knowledge and skills.
2. Standards and expectations for learning need to be raised to match international standards.

0-5

3. All early learning programs in the region will need to meet high quality standards to ensure that children are prepared to succeed in kindergarten.
4. Preparation and development of early childhood educators and family support systems need to be strengthened where they are less than reflective of best practice.
5. Rich data are needed to inform early childhood policy; policymakers need to draw on rich sources of data to make informed decisions about the size and characteristics of the population that will need to be served and the capacity and quality of early childhood programs. Trends in the data will help identify best practices and ensure that programs are continuously improved to increase children's readiness for school and schools' readiness to receive these children.

K-12

6. Adequate financial supports for public education need to be provided more equitably to ensure that schools have the resources they need to achieve quality programming; at the same time, economies of scale should be developed where districts are reorganized into fewer, more efficient and effective organizations.
7. Preparation and education of leaders for K-12 schools need to be strengthened in order to ensure that school leaders have the necessary skills to lead significant improvements in instruction and produce measurable gains in student learning.
8. Teachers need to be well prepared and continuously expanding their knowledge and skills to teach the subjects to which they are assigned as well as to meet the needs of increasing proportions of low-income, minority and English language-learning children in schools throughout the region as well as students with disabilities.

9. Schools must be organized and led so that all teachers can continue to develop professionally from the time they enter the workforce throughout their careers so they develop the capacity to provide students with high quality and challenging instruction.

Higher Education

10. The work of improving the preparation and continuing development of educators for all levels of education (0-5 and K-12) needs to be owned by higher education institutions in a comprehensive way that engages the intellectual resources of entire universities, including arts and sciences.

STRENGTHENING ACCESS AND READINESS

Issue Number Two is strengthening residents' access to all levels of education while also ensuring their readiness to succeed.

P-20

11. Educational pathways across all levels of education need to be more seamlessly linked to enable smooth transitions and to ensure that students are academically ready for the next level or for the workforce.
12. Educational institutions at all levels need to assist in the effective closing of achievement gaps that exist between income groups, linguistic minorities, and racial groups.
13. Comprehensive state-level data systems are needed to track individuals' pathways through education in order to evaluate the effectiveness of systems and to ensure success for all students.

0-5

14. Adequate resources need to be dedicated to early learning in order to expand access and ensure that resources are directed to the children and geographical areas that need early learning supports the most.
15. Norms and measures need to be established to determine children's readiness for school in the early years as well as schools' readiness to teach young children appropriately.

K-12

16. Data collection systems for students in elementary and secondary schools need to be more comprehensive to measure the impact of schools on students' academic, achievement, physical health, aesthetic development, and social-emotional learning; such systems are needed to enable policy makers, school personnel, and the public to monitor effectiveness of programs and systems.

Higher Education

17. College education should be affordable for all students in the seven-county region.
18. College graduation rates among African American and Latino students in particular need to increase to match the rate of white and Asian-American students.
19. Students graduating from post secondary education degree or certificate programs need to be able to make smooth transitions into the workforce, prepared with the skills and knowledge needed for employment and or next steps in their chosen careers.

STATE LEVEL OPPORTUNITIES

At least four major opportunities exist due to recent developments at the state level. The region's 2040 work in education can be supported by these developments and at the same time help to provide models of how to implement the work locally and within the region. These opportunities include the following:

1. **Creation of a P-20 Council:** In 2007, the Illinois State House of Representatives passed House Bill 1648 which contains the charter for the new Illinois P-20 Council. HB 1648 outlines the expectations and goals of the P-20 council.

The General Assembly finds that preparing Illinoisans for success in school and the workplace requires a continuum of quality education from preschool through graduate school. This State needs a framework to guide education policy and integrate education at every level. A statewide coordinating council to study and make recommendations concerning education at all levels can avoid fragmentation of policies, promote improved teaching and learning, and continue to cultivate and demonstrate strong accountability and efficiency. Establishing an Illinois P-20 Council will develop a statewide agenda that will move the State towards the common goals of improving academic achievement, increasing college access and success, improving use of existing data and measurements, developing improved accountability, promoting lifelong learning, easing the transition to college, and reducing remediation. A pre-kindergarten through grade 20 agenda will strengthen this State's economic competitiveness by producing a highly-skilled workforce. In addition, lifelong learning plans will enhance this State's ability to leverage funding.

P-20 has been defined in the state legislation as extending from pre-school through graduate education. However, because research shows that development before birth is critical to children's learning, for purposes of this report, we are defining P-20 as prenatal through graduate education.

2. **Student Information System Project:** In addition, the Illinois State Board of Education has begun implementing a statewide Student Information System to track children enrolled in Preschool for all and K-12 education. This system will allow

schools quickly to identify the needs of incoming students and to monitor their progress as they move on to the next level of their education. The state is currently pursuing federal funding to complete the project.

3. **Preschool for All Policy:** In 2006, Illinois became the first state in the nation to make all three- and four-year-olds eligible for voluntary, state-funded high-quality preschool, while also funding critical services to children under three. Program capacity and funding have not yet met the demand, however.
4. **School Leadership Development:** The Illinois State Board of Education is currently preparing legislation to transform school leadership preparation in Illinois to make it highly selective in admissions, rigorous in program and assessments, intensive in clinical training, and conducted with school districts themselves as active partners in the process. Improved development of principals will require new state resources and the commitment of higher education to improve its performance. An additional arena with promising potential is the strengthening of teacher leadership by the creation of more focus on graduate coursework and credentialing in the content areas so teachers can take on distributed leadership roles in schools around the issue of instruction.

Over the past three years the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois Board of Higher Education have collaborated to strengthen the preparation of Pre-K-12 school leaders in the state. To place a committed and competent principal in every school may be the single most cost effective intervention possible to support ongoing teacher development, the improvement of classroom instruction, and consequent improvement in student learning. The state agencies are seeking legislative action on a new school principal endorsement in Illinois in 2010, and we endorse this important step.

Much more remains to be done to prepare today's students for future success. Neither the state, nor a county, nor a district, nor a school can by itself produce the learning outcomes the region will need to meet the demands of an uncertain economic and technological future. All of these entities must work together to strengthen our education services in the region to benefit all our residents, which in turn will benefit our communities.

EDUCATION

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- Ounce of Prevention
- Voices for Illinois Children

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