



# GOAL I

## Increase educational attainment to match best-performing U.S. states and world countries.

For many Illinoisans, educational destiny is written before they even enter school, influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, access to quality preschool, and zip code. People of color, low-income students, persons with disabilities, and those who live in rural or certain inner-city areas are less likely to earn a high school diploma, attain a college degree, get a good-paying job, or have the mobility to find the schooling they need or the jobs they want.

### THE ISSUE: Achievement Gap

Illinois, like the nation, suffers a significant and enduring disparity in academic achievement and educational attainment affecting racial and ethnic minority students. This gap shows up early and worsens as students move through – or fall out of – the education pipeline.

### RECOMMENDATION I:

Increase success of students at each stage of the P-20 education pipeline to *eliminate achievement gaps* by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and disability.

- Illinois has one of the worst achievement gaps in the nation – only seven states have a greater disparity in educational attainment.<sup>1</sup> Whites are 28% more likely to have a college degree than minorities.<sup>2</sup>
- Fewer low-income students are entering college – between 1999 and 2006, the college participation rate dropped 5% for low-income students.<sup>3</sup>

### Achievement Gap in Elementary School ...

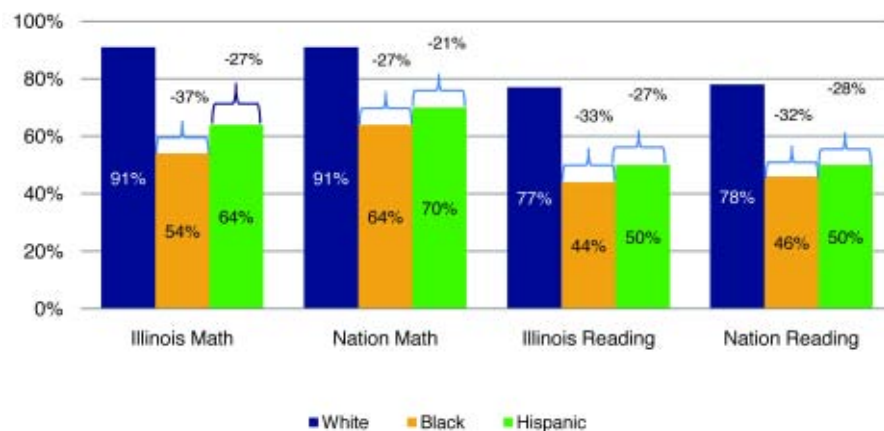


Figure 18. By 4th grade, significant gaps already have developed between white and minority students in the percentage performing at basic level or above. NAEP, 2007.

### ...Worsens by Middle School

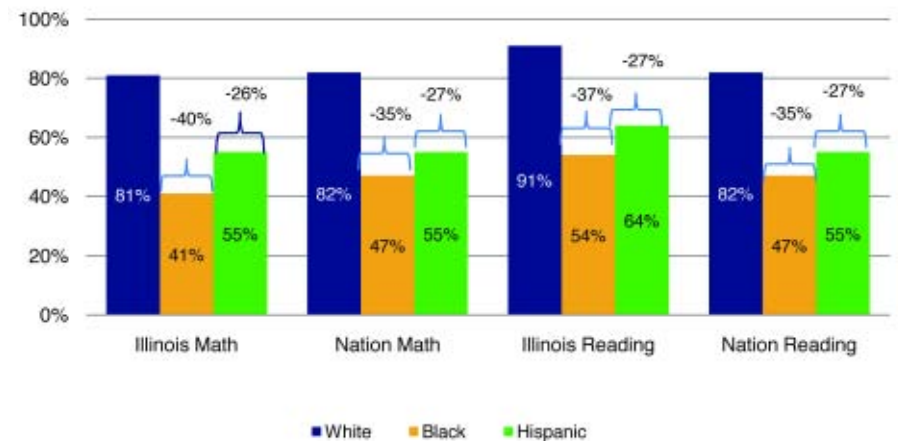


Figure 19. By 8th grade, performance gaps have widened or improved only marginally. NAEP, 2007.



- Less than one-quarter of the state's 3- and 4-year-olds were enrolled in prekindergarten programs in 2007.<sup>4</sup> The achievement gap is apparent in early elementary school and follows minority students through their schooling. Disparities in reading and math scores in the 4th grade worsen or improve only marginally by 8th grade for African Americans and Hispanics, compared to whites.<sup>5</sup>
- While 84 of every 100 white students graduate from high school, just 6 in 10 Hispanics and barely over half of African American students leave high school with a diploma.<sup>6</sup> An astonishing six out of ten black males are high school dropouts.<sup>7</sup>
- Remediation to correct academic deficiencies that high school graduates bring to college is a common and costly postsecondary challenge. In Illinois, community colleges shoulder the primary responsibility for remedial/develop-

mental education. An average of 50% of first-time, full-time community college students are required to take at least one remedial course; the figure rises to 80% in some college districts.<sup>8</sup>

- As a result of their responsibility for remedial/developmental education, community colleges spent \$120.8 million on remedial/developmental education in fiscal 2007.<sup>9</sup> Public universities spent \$5.2 million.<sup>10</sup>
- For people with disabilities, the educational attainment gap widens significantly beyond high school.<sup>11</sup>
- The students left behind by the achievement gap – predominantly students of color – are those who will make up the largest segment of Illinois' population growth over the next two decades.<sup>12</sup>

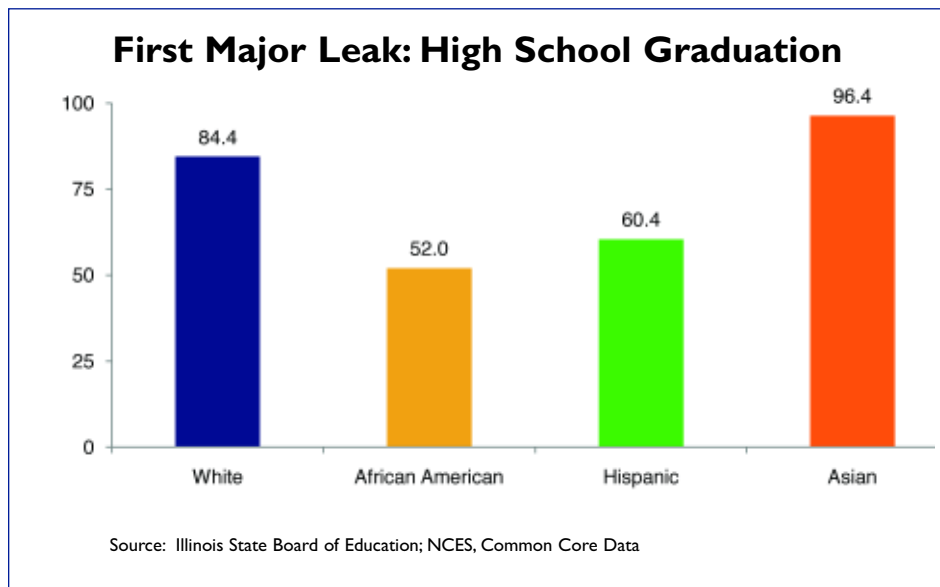


Figure 20. High school graduation rates, the percentage of 9th graders graduating four years later, by race/ethnicity. (Average of 2005-2006). The first major leak in the education pipeline comes at high school graduation when barely half of African American students and just three in five Hispanics leave with a diploma.

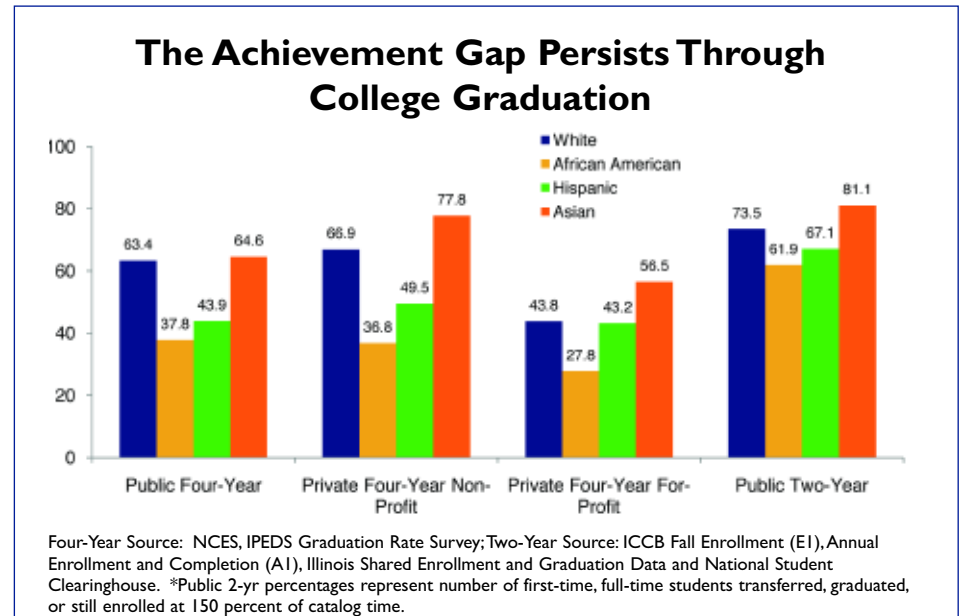


Figure 21. College graduation rates also reflect the disparities in educational attainment. Chart shows graduation rates within six years (or three years for community colleges) by race/ethnicity and higher education sector, 2006.

## Strategies to Eliminate the Achievement Gap

**STRATEGY:** Improve college readiness through curriculum alignment, access to quality preschools, postsecondary and high school partnerships, and links between student financial aid and a demanding high school curriculum.

### Action Steps:

- 1) Align a rigorous P-12 curriculum with college and workplace competencies and expectations through participation in the American Diploma Project (ADP).
- 2) Improve access to quality preschool education for all students through creation of a school-readiness assessment tool.
- 3) Increase the number of high-quality P-12 teachers and school leaders in low-performing schools.
- 4) Leverage financial aid for low-income students to encourage completion of a rigorous high school curriculum, as demonstrated by such successful efforts in other states as the 21st Century Scholars program in Indiana.
- 5) Reduce remediation for recent high school graduates through stronger postsecondary/high school partnerships for early identification and correction of gaps in knowledge and skills.
- 6) Provide incentive grants for postsecondary institutions to work with P-12 schools to establish creative and effective student support services, such as mentoring and college information campaigns, to improve college readiness and lower the achievement gap.

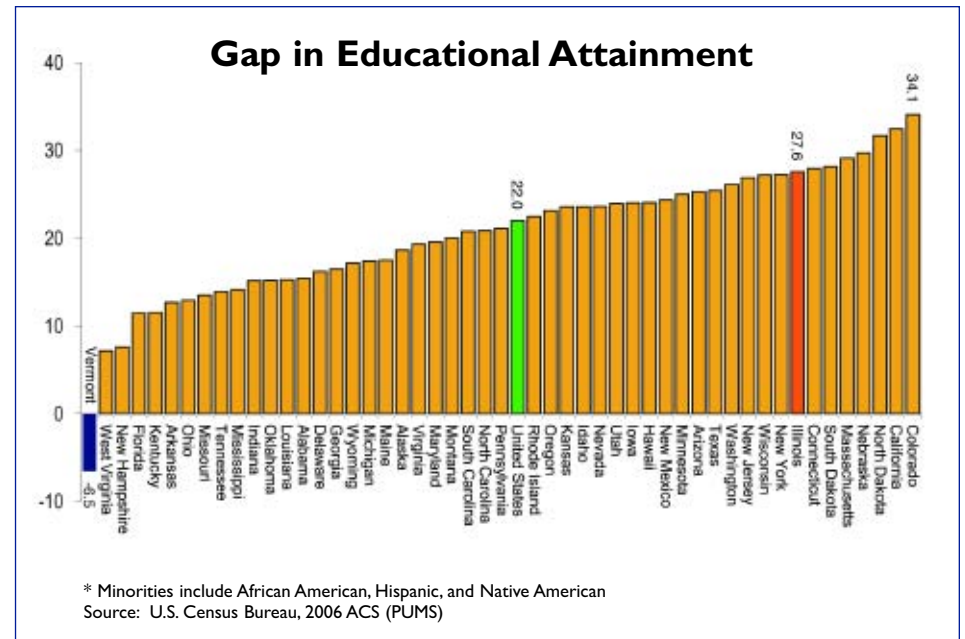


Figure 22. Difference in college attainment between whites and minorities, 2006. Only seven states have a greater disparity between white and minority students in college attainment.

- 7) Implement a High School to College Success Report that will give high schools feedback on how their graduates performed in college.
- 8) Increase high-quality dual-credit opportunities for all high school students, including implementation of early college high schools.
- 9) Establish a P-20 longitudinal data system to improve accountability.
- 10) Support secondary/postsecondary program alignment through implementation of Perkins Programs of Study, a major federal grant program for career and technical education designed to reduce remediation and increase attainment of postsecondary degrees and certificates.



**STRATEGY: Strengthen teacher and school leader quality through upgraded standards and professional development.**

**Action Steps:**

- 11) Strengthen requirements and standards for subject-matter competence and pedagogy for teachers at elementary, middle, and secondary levels.
- 12) Establish high-quality professional development programs for teachers and school leaders, including professional development schools, with the focus on increased student achievement.

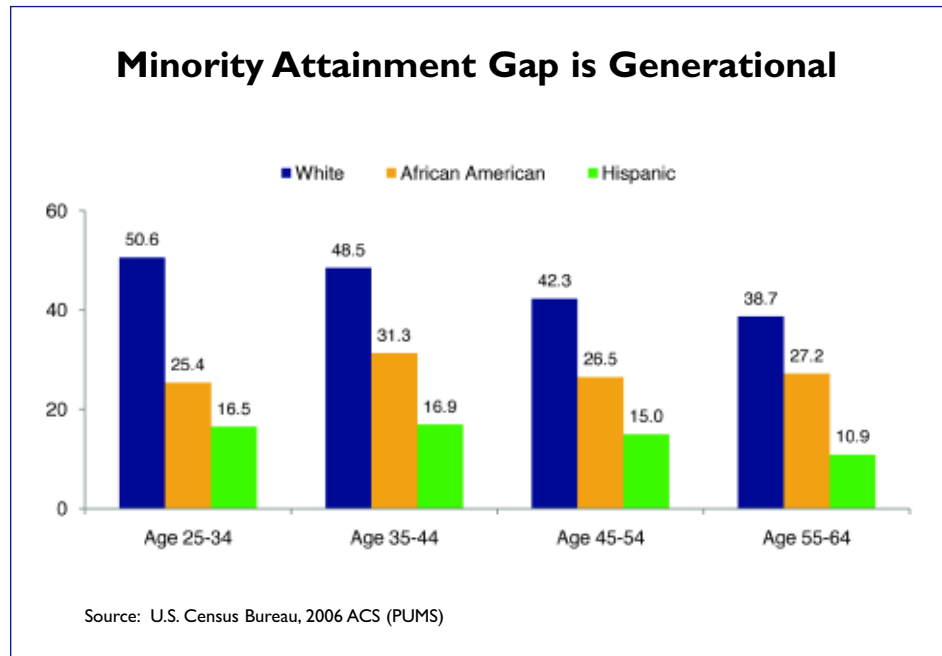


Figure 23. Percent of adults with a college degree (associate's or higher) by age and race/ethnicity, 2006. The gap in educational attainment between whites and African Americans is wider for younger generations than for their elders.

**STRATEGY: Build success for students with disabilities through assistive technologies, improved transitions from high school to college, and Perkins Programs of Study.**

**Action Steps:**

- 13) Improve student success in college with effective accommodations of students with disabilities through full access to the Internet and online information for students with disabilities; the use of assistive technology; information about careers and employment, internships, and work study, along with information about the importance and methods of self-advocacy.
- 14) Collaborate with P-20 institutions to improve transition of students with disabilities from P-12 to college, and from college to employment, including documenting employment status of students and graduates with disabilities.
- 15) Implement Perkins Programs of Study that specifically target individuals with disabilities.



## RECOMMENDATION 1:

### ***Performance Measures***

Proportion of adults age 25-34 with associate's degree or higher.

Trend of ethnic and racial groups with high school diploma.

Trend of ethnic and racial groups and students with disabilities with postsecondary credential.

Trend of students in collegiate remedial courses.

Trend of attainment by income level.

### ***Benchmarked Against***

Best-performing Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries.

Five best-performing U.S. states.

Selected competitor/neighborhood states.

## RECOMMENDATION 2:

**Increase the number of adults, including GED recipients, reentering education and completing a postsecondary credential.**

### ***THE ISSUE: College Credentials for Adult Learners***

To meet future economic demands, Illinois cannot rely alone on improving educational attainment among traditional age college students and importing college graduates from outside Illinois. The state and employers must reach out to adults who make up a reservoir of untapped talent – those needing a GED, a specialized certificate, or a college degree – to provide the skills, knowledge, and credentials from postsecondary education.

- Illinois has 8 million working-age adults, of whom:
  - 65% have not completed college;
  - 24% have attended college but have no degree;
  - 28% have a high school diploma but no postsecondary experience;
  - 14% have not completed high school;
  - 15% live in families whose combined income is less than a living wage; and
  - 5% speak little or no English.<sup>13</sup>
- Illinois ranks in the bottom third of states in the number of GEDs awarded.<sup>14</sup>
- Only 25% of the parents of students with disabilities indicate that their child received career development training before or during postsecondary education.<sup>15</sup>
- Although Illinois rates relatively high (12th) in working age population with a bachelor's degree or higher, it is only 27th in the percentage with an associate's degree.<sup>16</sup>



- Illinois has an in-migration of high school dropouts, age 30-64. In all other categories of educational attainment, more people in that prime working-age population leave the state than enter it.<sup>17</sup>

### Strategies to Increase College Credentials for Adults

**STRATEGY:** Increase support for adult students through an emphasis on adult basic education and GED completion, financial aid, support services, and incentives for adults with substantial college credit to finish degrees.

### Action Steps:

- 16) Increase support for adult education programs, GED completion, and specialized training, such as occupational bridge programs, leading to postsecondary certificates and degrees.
- 17) Improve financial aid opportunities for part-time adult learners.
- 18) Ensure place-bound students have adequate and appropriate academic, career development, and support services to complete a college credential.
- 19) Develop a state incentive to identify adults with substantial postsecondary credit hours and assist them in completing a degree.

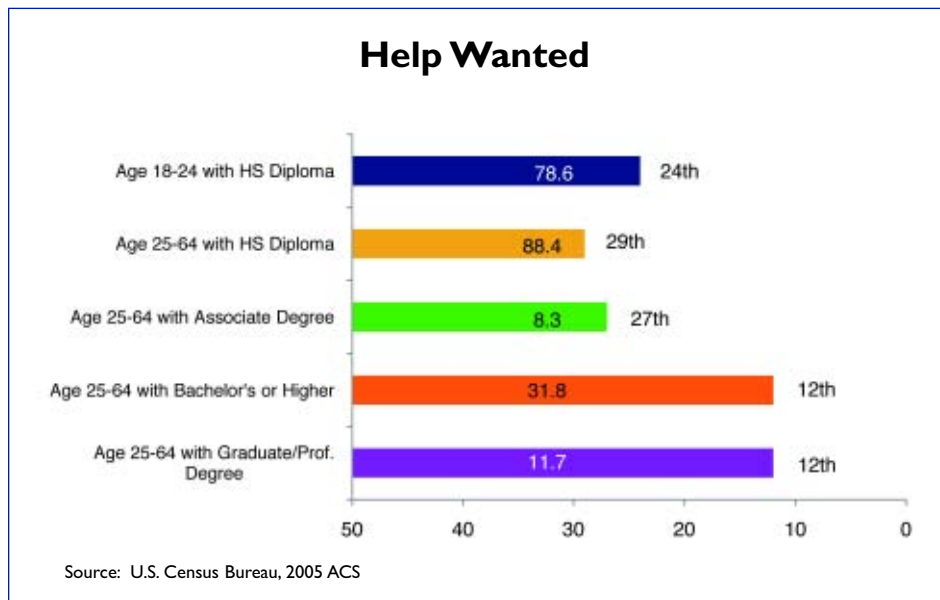


Figure 24. Educational attainment and rank among states – Illinois, 2005, (measured in percent). Illinois does relatively well in attainment at the bachelor's level and above but needs to improve attainment of credentials beyond high school to meet workforce demands.

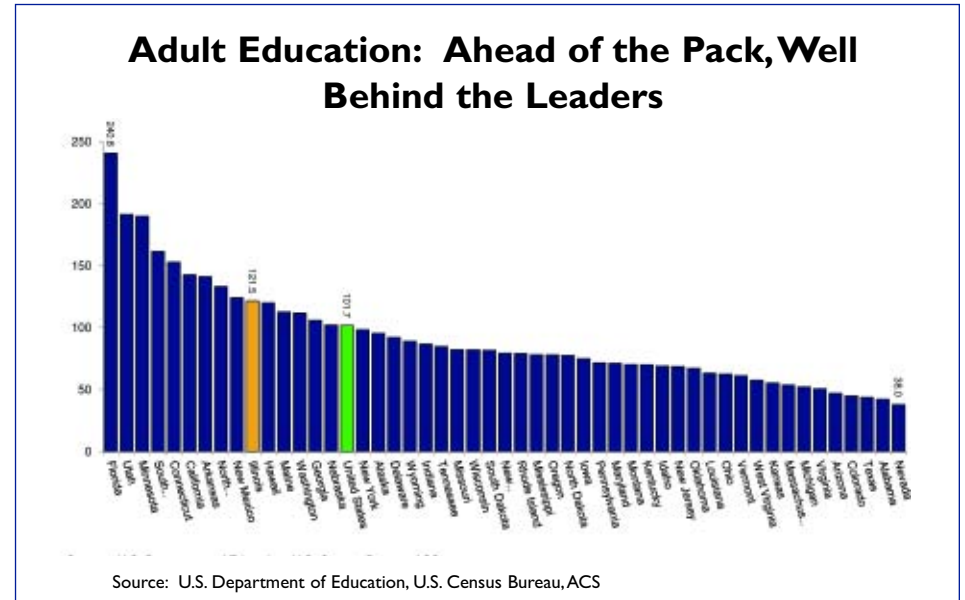


Figure 25. Enrollment in state-administered Adult Basic Education programs per 1,000 adults age 18-64 with less than a high school diploma, 2005. Illinois does relatively well in getting adults into Adult Basic Education, though still far below best-performing states.



**STRATEGY: Expand opportunities for adult learners through regional partnerships, baccalaureate completion programs, and new entryways for low-skilled residents.**

**Action Steps:**

- 20) Establish regional partnerships involving educational institutions and agencies, employers, and labor unions to improve educational attainment for adult learners.
- 21) Develop a system of employability certification.
- 22) Expand baccalaureate completion opportunities through partnerships between two-year and four-year institutions.

- 23) Develop incentives for working adults to complete degrees or other postsecondary credentials.
- 24) Establish partnerships between community organizations and educational institutions to provide new entryways into college for low-skilled residents with support services to enable them to complete their programs.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**Performance Measures**

Number of GEDs awarded to adults 21-44 as a proportion of adults age 21-44 with less than a high school diploma.

First-time freshmen age 25-44 as a proportion of adults age 21-44 with a high school diploma but no college.

Degrees awarded to adults age 25-44 as a proportion of population age 25-44 with no college degree.

Annual report on number and trend of adult learners earning certificates or degrees.

Report showing annual job placements.

**Benchmarked Against**

Five best-performing U.S. states.

Selected competitor/neighboring states.

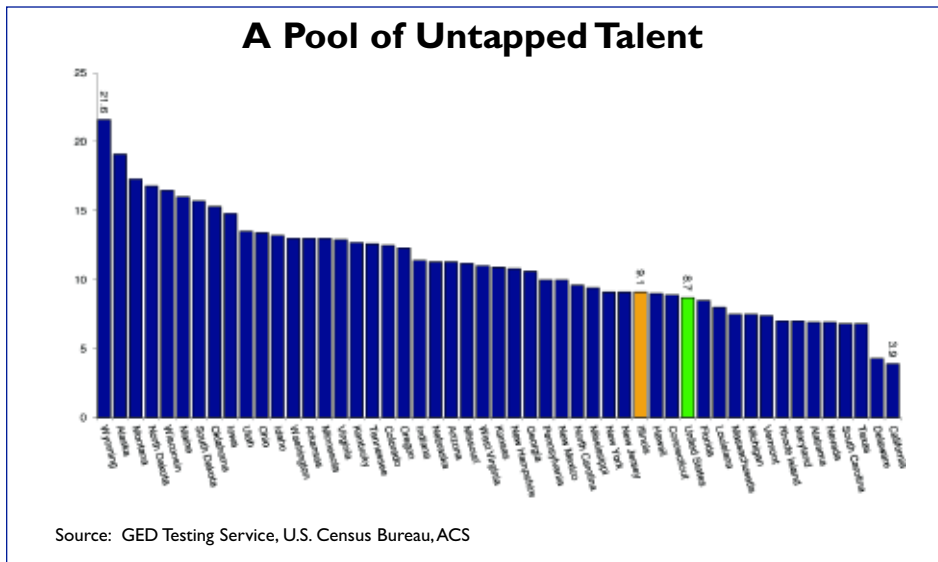


Figure 26. GEDs awarded per 1,000 adults age 25-44 with less than a high school diploma, 2005. Illinois' low rank in awarding GEDs leaves a significant pool of talent untapped and ill-prepared for employment at a living wage.



## RECOMMENDATION 3: Reduce geographic disparities in educational attainment.

### THE ISSUE: *Geographic Disparities*

Illinois is a wealthy state, but the wealth is spread unevenly. Likewise, educational attainment varies significantly from one region to another. A significant challenge

to ensuring that Illinois has a 21st century workforce for the 21st century economy is reducing disparities in educational opportunity and performance by region.

- Significant regional variations exist in high school graduation and postsecondary participation.<sup>18</sup>
- Income varies greatly from one region to another.<sup>19</sup>

### The Geography of Educational Attainment

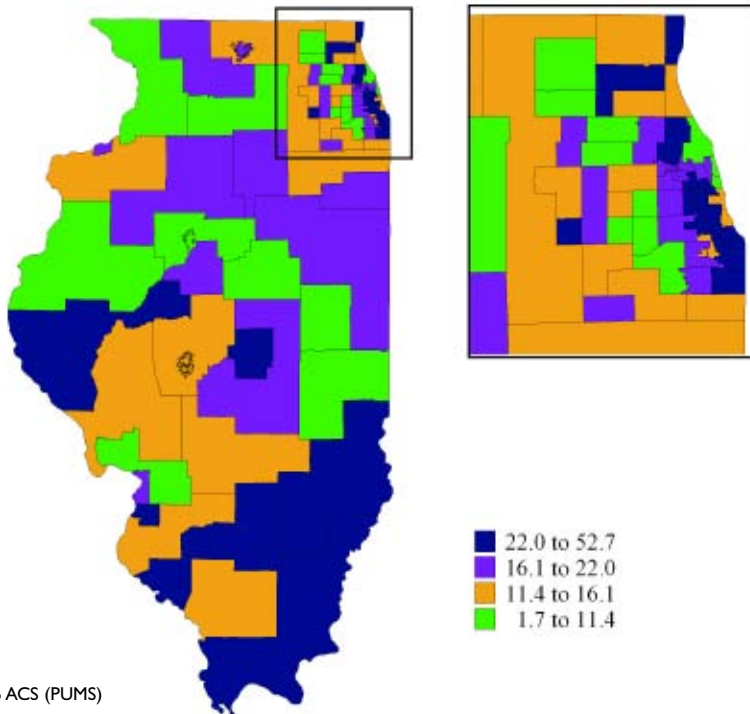


Figure 27. Percent of population age 18-24 with no high school diploma, 2006 (Public Use Microdata Areas). Geographic disparities in educational attainment present impediments to improving regional economies.

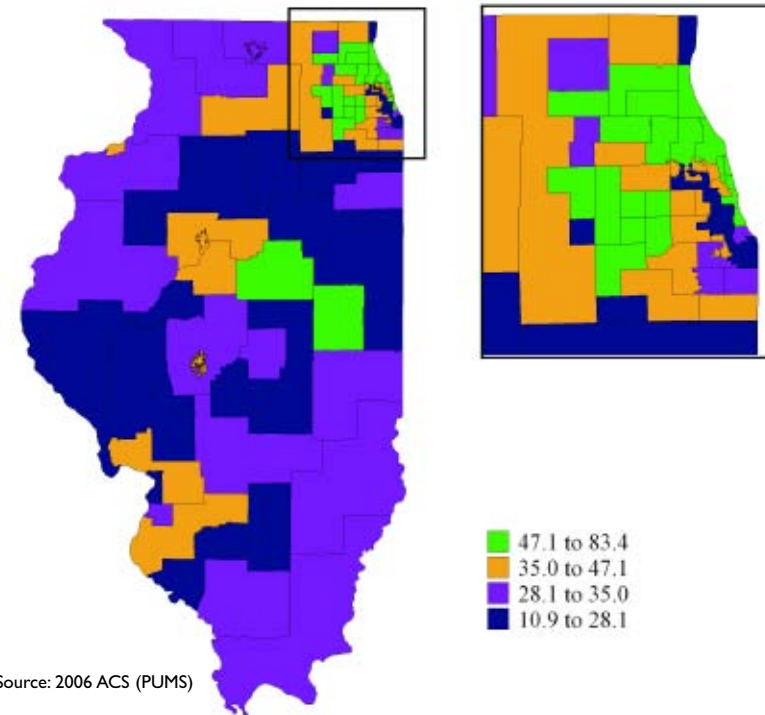


Figure 28. Percent of population age 25-64 with an associate's degree or higher, 2006 (Public Use Microdata Areas).





- High-wage jobs are held by residents in very few parts of the state, primarily in Chicago suburban communities and around major universities.<sup>20</sup>

### **Strategies for Reducing Educational Attainment Disparities by Region**

**STRATEGY: Expand capacity through improved access to postsecondary education in rural areas of the state, baccalaureate completion opportunities, distance learning, and dual credit.**

#### **Action Steps:**

- 25) Expand access to postsecondary opportunities for students in less populated regions and for place-bound students.
- 26) Expand baccalaureate completion opportunities through partnerships between two-year and four-year institutions.
- 27) Employ technology to improve statewide access to high-quality courses and degree programs.
- 28) Implement programs to expand access to computers and broadband Internet access to reduce the digital divide for rural and low-income students.
- 29) Increase high-quality dual credit opportunities for all high school students to earn dual and early college credit.

**STRATEGY: Strengthen college readiness through implementation of a High School to College Success Report and partnerships between community colleges and high schools.**

#### **Action Steps:**

- 30) Implement a High School to College Success Report that will give high schools feedback on how their graduates performed in college.
- 31) Reduce remediation for recent high school graduates through stronger community college/high school partnerships.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3:**

### **Performance Measures**

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### **Benchmarked Against**

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