

TOO FEW HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE COLLEGE-READY

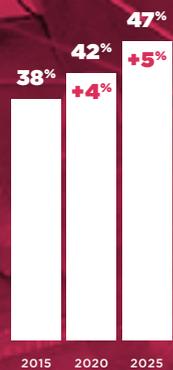
GRADUATION RATES INCREASE, BUT ACT SCORES STAGNANT

The good news is increasing numbers of Illinois students are graduating high school within five years: currently 88% of high schoolers are graduating versus 84% in 2012.¹⁹ The graduation rate has increased for students of all backgrounds, including low-income students and students of color.²⁰ Educators, parents and community members should be commended for coming together to support students in their efforts to earn a diploma.

However, on a key measure of whether students are ready for college—the ACT—only 38% of Illinois high school graduates are scoring as college ready. This figure has not budged since 2012. The gap means too many students are graduating high school but are not college ready.

Higher scores on the ACT correlate with college degrees: students who meet three or more ACT college readiness benchmarks have a better than 75% chance of earning a postsecondary degree.²¹

ROAD TO 2025



COLLEGE READINESS



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE



STUDENTS READY IN THREE OR MORE ACT SUBJECTS

2012

2015

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT ROCKFORD

A new approach in Rockford is uniting unlikely stakeholders to solve the complex transition from high school to college. Alignment Rockford, the backbone of a public-private initiative, has the school district in the midst of a dramatic transformation that has gained national recognition. The nonprofit worked with Rockford Public Schools to launch a new approach which emphasizes project-based learning, smaller learning communities, career planning, and input and expertise from the business community. Early indications suggest it has yielded higher attendance rates and less truancy.

At the core of the changes in Rockford are college and career “academies,” formatted as schools within schools that span business, engineering, human services and health sciences, and align high school courses with postsecondary expectations. At Guilford High School’s Engineering, Manufacturing, Industrial and Trades Technology academy, for example, English, math and social studies incorporate project-based concepts from real-world engineering and manufacturing. Students interested in professional degrees and certificate programs work side-by-side in classes such as Construction I, held in the school’s construction and fabrication lab. The school had done away with a similar industrial arts lab years ago, only to bring it back as the community recognized that hands-on learning had value in preparing all students for life after high school. When students enter Guilford, they identify a career pathway in 9th grade, enabling them to develop skills that will be relevant across careers.

All 9th graders attend a citywide Academy Expo to help determine their high school academy. The expo brings together 140 careers from participating businesses, 3,000 students and 900 volunteers. “At the expo, you learn that you don’t have to go to San Francisco to be part of a tech firm,” said Jack Snedegar, an 11th grader in the Business, Arts, Modern World Languages and Information Technology Academy at Guilford.

Visit advanceillinois.org/2025 to read more about Alignment Rockford.



OPPORTUNITY ILLINOIS 60 BY 25 NETWORK

Business leaders, schools and community partners working together to improve student outcomes in seven regions of the state have joined a network to learn from each other and share their successes. The Illinois 60 by 25 Network addresses the challenge of degree completion, filling a shortage of skilled labor and prioritizing educational backgrounds that are in demand locally. The network serves as a model for other communities seeking bold changes to their education systems. For more on inspiring your community, visit advanceillinois.org/2025.