

Illinois  
**VISION 20/20**  
Final Report



December 2020



**VISION 20/20**  
Fulfilling the Promise of Public Education

# VISION 20/20

## From Vision to Action: 2012-2020

Before the launch of Vision 20/20, education organizations were widely known at the state capitol for what they opposed rather than what they supported.

In November 2012, the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) initiated a visioning process in partnership with the Illinois Principals Association (IPA), the Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), the Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity (SCSDD), and the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) to unite the education community and change that perception.

What transpired was unique and unprecedented. The groups, with membership across every corner of the state, collaborated and developed a long-term plan that challenged the state legislature and governor to take action to fulfill the promise of public education in Illinois by the year 2020. Over the past eight years, the Vision 20/20 blueprint helped produce meaningful and lasting changes to public education in Illinois, most notably the passage of the Evidence-Based Funding formula. In addition, the process elevated the voices of educators on public policy matters in our state and led to Dr. Donna Leak, superintendent of Community Consolidated School District #168, becoming the first active superintendent ever to serve on the Board of the Illinois State Board of Education.

Vision 20/20's success was rooted in the commitment and dedication of members in the six stakeholder groups, who increased their efforts to communicate with legislators and policymakers and make their voices heard. In total, more than 500 districts, representing nearly 1 million students, signed on to support Vision 20/20.

As 2020 comes to a close, this document serves as a final report of Vision 20/20. The report examines accomplishments between 2012 and 2020, organized through the lens of four priorities:

- Equitable and Adequate Funding
- Highly Effective Educators
- 21st Century Learning
- Shared Accountability

The progress made, as detailed in this report, was not solely achieved by Vision 20/20. Other education groups, advocates and policymakers played instrumental roles in these accomplishments during the past eight years.

While the Vision 20/20 plan was unique and successful, the stakeholders recognize work remains. The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges for public education while also shining a light on existing issues. Priorities moving forward will include, but are not limited to, increased funding of the Evidence-Based Funding formula, addressing racial disparities in educational opportunities, curbing the teacher shortage and expanding broadband internet. And, on a broader scale, what should education look like post-pandemic?

We hope you will take a few minutes to review this final report. Once the pandemic is clearly behind us, IASA, along with the other stakeholders will begin a visioning process to address this monumental task facing public education. Your input will once again be vital to its success. Together we stand for excellence in education for all Illinois children.



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## From Vision to Action

In districts throughout Illinois, concerns remain regarding equity, access and opportunities for continuous improvement. Specifically, Vision 20/20 identified four priorities for the State of Illinois to have the most immediate and profound impact on public education: highly effective educators, 21st century learning, shared accountability, and equitable and adequate funding.



### VISION 20/20 PRIORITIES

#### EQUITABLE AND ADEQUATE SCHOOL FUNDING



- Fund Education Based on Local Need
- Stabilize State Funding for Education
- Enhance District Flexibility to Increase Financial Efficiency

#### HIGHLY EFFECTIVE EDUCATORS



- Recruit and Retain High-Impact Educators
- Provide Relevant Professional Development

#### 21ST CENTURY LEARNING



- Develop the “Whole Child”
- Invest in Early Childhood Education
- College and Career Readiness
- Expand Equity in Technology Access

#### SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY



- Expand Educator Role and Responsibility in State Governance
- Implement a Balanced Accountability System
- Restructure Mandates





### EQUITABLE AND ADEQUATE SCHOOL FUNDING

#### Fund Education Based on Local Need

On August 31, 2017, the Evidence-Based Funding for Student Success Act, or Public Act 100-0465, became law. Five previous grant programs were combined into a single grant program and distributed as Evidence-Based Funding (EBF). Those grant programs are General State Aid, Special Education—Personnel, Special Education—Funding for Children Requiring Special Education Services, Special Education—Summer School and English Learner Education.

EBF sets a target of increasing year-to-year state formula funding for K–12 education by at least \$300 million (the “Minimum Target Level”). Illinois satisfied the Minimum Target Level for increased year-to-year state funding of K–12 education in each of the first three fiscal years—FY 2018, 2019 and 2020. Due to significant revenue loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, FY 2021 funding was held level.

In those three fiscal years, Illinois moved from having more than 160 school districts below 60% of adequacy to only 14 districts in FY 19. The impact on the ground was immense.

In its “[Making a Difference](#)” series, IASA cataloged how EBF benefited 80 school districts across the state. Superintendents shared stories of academic growth, new STEM programs created, additional social workers and counselors hired, reduced class sizes, electives restored, improved student safety, instructional coaches added and new learning opportunities for students being provided.

“EBF has provided a ray of hope for our district. It’s no longer a matter of wishing we could do that. We can actually do things now, and it’s had an immediate impact on kids.”

—Dr. Corey Tafoya, Superintendent, Harvard CUSD #50

“It’s amazing what a few dollars can do. It’s a slow process, but we are off to a good start in the transformation of our district.”

—Rodolfo Hernandez, Superintendent, Cicero SD #99

Beyond tangible measurements, superintendents interviewed in the series repeatedly expressed how the additional funding has been transformative.

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“It’s amazing what a few dollars can do. It’s a slow process, but we are off to a good start in the transformation of our district,” said Rodolfo Hernandez, superintendent of Cicero SD #99.

However, the work is far from over. Half of Illinois school districts remain below 70% funded, and the goal of funding the formula fully within 10 years of its implementation is impossible at this current pace. According to the Illinois State Board of Education, as of FY 2020, the EBF was underfunded statewide by some \$6.8 billion, an amount that will exceed \$7 billion by the end of FY 2021.

Moving forward, it is imperative the General Assembly keeps its promise of allocating at least \$350 million in EBF funding each year. According to [research](#) from Picus, Odden & Associates and the Illinois School Finance Adequacy Task Force, academic growth, improved teacher retention and an increase in graduation rates occur when significant investments are made in districts that need it the most across a sustained period of time.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic and decline in state revenue makes this goal a significant challenge. Stakeholders will once again need to make their voices heard and be strong advocates for increased funding.



Vision 20/20 stakeholders recognized increasing the availability and equitable distribution of highly effective educators must be a top priority, not only because of the teacher shortage situation, but because research shows the best thing we as a state can do to improve public education is attract and develop highly effective educators. Continuous, high-quality, job-embedded professional development and opportunities for educator collaboration are a necessary part of an effective continuous improvement process.

The efforts of Vision 20/20 made strides to address the teacher shortage, but significant issues remain in increasing the availability and equitable distribution of highly effective educators. Here is a closer look at specific Vision 20/20 policy proposals to address the teacher shortage and other meaningful reforms that have been approved.

## Licensure Reciprocity

Public Act 99-58 streamlined the licensure process for teachers and administrators and established reciprocity with other states in order to increase the pool of qualified candidates for positions in Illinois.

## Recruit Teachers into the Profession

By amending the Educator Licensure Article of the School Code, Public Act 100-0596 made changes to provisions concerning the licensure powers of the Illinois State Board of Education, the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (including adding two members), types of licenses (including removing and adding certain endorsements on an educator license with stipulations), endorsements on PELs, educator testing, the minimum requirements for educators trained in other states or countries, application fees, license renewal, the Alternative Educator Licensure Program for Teachers, alternative route to superintendent endorsement programs and the approval of educator preparation institutions.

## Basic Skills Test, Student Teachers, edTPA

Public Act 101-0220 eliminated the requirement that teacher candidates pass a test of basic skills to receive a Professional Educator License. The law was later amended to remove an unintended barrier for paraprofessionals. In the same piece of legislation, the General Assembly approved allowing districts to pay student teachers and let teachers in underfunded schools recoup the cost of the edTPA.

## End of Career Pension Limitations

In 2019, the General Assembly repealed the 3 percent salary threshold on teacher salaries and reinstated the 6 percent salary threshold. The change was made in the budget implementation bill.

## Increase Substitute Teacher Pool

Public Act 100-0596 enhanced the state's pool of substitute teachers by:

- Allowing the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to issue short-term substitute teacher licenses to applicants with an associate's degree or 60 hours of college credit;
- Providing reciprocity for comparable and valid educator licensures from other states;
- Allowing retired teachers, through June 30, 2020, to work 120 days or 600 paid hours in each school year without jeopardizing retirement benefits, but not more than 100 days in the same classroom; and
- Requiring school boards to collaborate with teachers and unions to develop short-term substitute teacher training programs.

The provision to allow retired teachers to work 120 days or 600 paid hours in each school year without jeopardizing retirement benefits was extended to June 30, 2021, during the spring 2020 legislative session.



# VISION 20/20

Fulfilling the Promise of Public Education

Public Act 99-0920 also helped alleviate some barriers to hiring substitute teachers. Provisions of the bill included reducing the substitute license fee from \$100 to \$50 and creating a one-year grace period for retired teachers with lapsed licenses to bring their license into good standing without fines or coursework.

As mentioned previously, there is still much that needs to be done to encourage young people to enter the teaching profession. One such area is the recruitment of African-Americans and other minorities. According to Illinois Report Card data, currently 82 percent of teachers in the state are White, 7 percent are Hispanic and 6 percent are Black. Of the state's 2 million students, 47 percent are White, 26 percent Hispanic and 16 percent are Black.

Unfortunately, the teacher shortage has gotten worse in recent years. According to the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools, superintendents in 85% of the districts surveyed in 2018 believed that they have either a major or a minor problem with teacher shortages, which is up from 78% from the 2017 survey. Further, 79% believe that they have received significantly fewer applicants than five years ago, which also is up from 65% from the 2017 survey.

The COVID-19 pandemic will likely also exacerbate short- and long-term challenges for school districts. Any strategy to seriously address the teacher shortage will have to be multifaceted and meaningful.





## 21ST CENTURY LEARNING

Vision 20/20 recognized all Illinois students deserve 21st-century instruction that provides equitable access to modern learning environments that allow them to learn and apply knowledge, think creatively and be well-prepared for global citizenry.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Vision 20/20 pushed for additional funding for broadband expansion. The FY 2019 Budget Implementation Act, HB 3342 (Public Act 100-587), provided \$16.3 million from the School Infrastructure Fund to the Illinois State Board of Education, to improve internet connectivity.

The push for broadband expansion got a big boost when the General Assembly approved a much-needed statewide infrastructure plan in 2019, known as Rebuild Illinois.

The “Connect Illinois” initiative directed the state to make a \$420 million investment into broadband expansion. Of that total, \$400 million is to the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for a statewide broadband deployment grant program. The other \$20 million is dedicated for the Illinois Century Network (ICN) to repair and expand the broadband network for schools, refresh aged components of the network and expand the existing network, with a focus on the K–12 portion.

Another useful component for schools was the creation of the K–12 Broadband Network. The initiative provides secure internet and broadband connectivity at no charge to Illinois Public K–12 schools that join the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) Consortium. The state has also created a Broadband Advisory Council to develop a strategic plan of how to expand internet access.

While progress had been made on goals Vision 20/20 identified years earlier about the need for the state to close the digital divide, much work remains.

The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the inequities that exist across the state. Large swaths of students, primarily in rural areas, did not have internet access in their homes when school buildings closed in the spring. In addition, the cost of Wi-Fi in areas where broadband is available was a barrier for many families.

However, efforts at the state and local levels quickly resulted in a rapid expansion of internet access and put devices into

the hands of students. Furthermore, districts developed remote learning plans and procedures and invested in digital resources that will have a lasting impact.

## Whole Child

A key provision of Vision 20/20 was to develop the “whole child.” The initiative advocated for current social and emotional standards to be aligned across curriculum and expanded to include safety and cyberbullying resources. As a result, many districts engaged in a review of their policies, procedures and goals related to not only safety, but also to technology, resources and bullying resources to help students across the state.

Vision 20/20 also advocated for the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to ensure that digital learning skills are embedded into the Illinois Learning Standards. In the most recent era of remote learning, districts have been able to hone digital learning skills, assess areas of need and create digital learning skills into all grade levels and content areas.

## College and Career Readiness

The Postsecondary Workforce Readiness (PWR) Act (Public Act 99-674), signed into law in 2016, takes a student-based and competency-based approach to helping students achieve college and career readiness. The act listed four strategies to help students prepare for postsecondary and career opportunities:

- Offering a Postsecondary and Career Expectations framework.
- Piloting competency-based high school graduation requirements.
- Supporting students to avoid remediation in college through targeted math instruction during their senior year.
- Creating a new system for school districts to award college and career pathways endorsements on high school diplomas.

In addition, dual credit coursework for high school students was expanded with the passage of Public Act 100-1049. The act includes expanding dual credit in order to reduce college costs, speed time to completion, facilitate the transition between high school and college, and offer opportunities for improving degree attainment for underserved populations.



## Invest in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education remains a key component to the success of 21st Century Learning. In FY 2019, the state allocated an additional \$50 million for the Early Childhood Block Grant. The increase was necessary to keep with terms of a federal block grant agreement. The state built on that foundation in FY 2020 when the General Assembly included \$50 million in additional funding.

As a result, Illinois preschools enrolled 81,161 children in 2018–2019, an increase of 6,022 children from the prior year. [Research](#) shows support of early learning better prepares children to succeed in the primary grades and reduces achievement gaps that emerge well before kindergarten.

The state's current budget kept the Early Childhood Block Grant level. In order to expand preschool access across the state, additional funding is needed to the Early Childhood Block Grant.



Vision 20/20 recognized student learning should be the number one priority of the education system and that providing greater flexibility in local decision-making will allow for innovation and a direct impact on student performance.

The work of Vision 20/20 led to the implementation of a balanced accountability system, a precursor to Illinois' Every Student Succeeds Act plan. For nearly 18 months, members of a Vision 20/20 subcommittee convened to develop the accountability system and make recommendations to the state, including a weighted accountability system, the Quality Framework and Illinois Empower system.

The result was Public Act 99-193, which made changes concerning references to adequate yearly progress with respect to the Illinois State Board of Education's recognition standards for student performance and school improvement, the State Board's system of rewards for school districts and schools, the State Board's system to acknowledge schools, state interventions and remote educational programs.

Some of the framework of IBAM was adopted in Illinois' ESSA plan, although the federal plan places more emphasis on standardized assessments.

In addition, the act created the Balanced Accountability Measure Committee within the Illinois State Board of Education. The committee still convenes and focuses on developing recognition standards for student performance and school improvement for all school districts and their individual schools.

## Practicing Educator on ISBE

Another major accomplishment of Vision 20/20 was ensuring a practicing educator serves on the Illinois State Board of Education Board. The passage of Public Act 100-1135 provides that three ISBE board members represent the educator community. Allowing practicing educators to serve on the ISBE Board provides professional expertise that helps guide the implementation of state initiatives and helps ensure that oversight and regulatory efforts positively impact student learning. As a result of the legislation, Dr. Donna Leak, superintendent of CCSD #168, was appointed to the ISBE Board in February 2019.

## Restructure Mandates

Another focus of the Shared Accountability pillar included unfunded mandate relief. The passage of the Evidence-Based Funding Formula provided some help in this area, including:

- School boards can determine the frequency of physical education as long as it is a minimum of three days per five-day week (the state previously required daily PE). Also, districts may exempt on a case-by-case basis 7th through 12th graders who participate in sports.
- School districts can contract with third party driver's education vendors without requesting a waiver from the General Assembly.
- Schools now have a more streamlined process to request waivers from the General Assembly from other state mandates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the state's accountability systems and further conversation is needed on Illinois' ESSA plan and the role of standardized assessments.





# VISION 20/20

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To close, thank you for all of your help in making sure Vision 20/20 produced meaningful and lasting changes to public education in Illinois. The success truly was rooted in the advocacy efforts of members of each stakeholder group. Together we can make additional strides toward excellence in education for all Illinois children.

