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Stand for Children Issues Report on Reversing Illinois Brain Drain

Only New Jersey Loses More Graduates to Out-Of-State Colleges than Illinois.

Chicago – Stand for Children Illinois, a non-partisan, equity-focused education advocacy non-profit, announced the release of its report, “STOP ILLINOIS BRAIN DRAIN: Building Pathways to Prosperity for High School Students.” The report proposes state- and district-level policy changes and practices that will quickly have a positive impact in helping high schools graduate more students who are ready for college, career training, or careers.

“An alarming number of high school graduates are leaving the Prairie State. Only New Jersey has worse brain drain,” said Mimi Rodman, Executive Director of Stand for Children Illinois. “Our high school graduates are voting with their feet and going to out-of-state colleges, which is another example of the toll that the state budget crises took on education. Strengthening our high schools is critical for those who go onto college, and those who choose career training or join the workforce after high school. A critical component to setting Illinois high schoolers up for success is breaking down the silos between Illinois high schools on the one hand, and colleges, career centers, and workplace experiences, on the other.”

The facts are stark.

- More than one-third of Illinois high schools do not offer Calculus, a course that students considering careers in engineering and other advanced STEM fields should be able to access.
- Statewide, Illinois has a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:664 -- a far cry from the recommended ratio of one counselor for every 250 students.
- Manufacturing, energy, and health sciences represent about half of the jobs in Illinois, yet only 12% of career and technical education students enroll in classes in these sectors.

“From the moment students start high school, school should be setting them up well for their next phase of life, not just for their next class. Students should be immersed in career possibilities and supported to understand how to achieve their career goals,” said Rodman.

The report points to a number of structural improvements in place in the state that can be leveraged to reduce brain drain. These include increasing college and career counseling support, better aligning career education enrollment with labor market trends, creating statewide dual credit opportunities, and funding innovative competency-based learning programs. The state must ensure that high school students in every corner of the state have access to enriching pathways that lead to prosperity. The implications are enduring and state-wide.

The recommendations in Stand’s report fall into four categories:

1. Open More Doors to Individualized Coursework
2. Provide Practical Workplace Experiences
3. Modernize the Approach for Supporting Students
4. Adequately Fund Education and Spend Wisely

Collectively, these recommendations present Illinois with an achievable, impactful pathway for policymakers and advocates to make prosperity a reality for Illinois high school students.

The report caps off a year of study and discussions with leaders in the field by Stand’s 2017-18 Class of Illinois Policy Fellows. Read the report and its Executive Summary at stand.org/stopilbraindrain. Hard copies are available upon request.

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Stand for Children Illinois is a non-partisan education advocacy organization focused on ensuring all students receive a high quality, relevant education, especially children whose boundless potential is overlooked and under-tapped because of their skin color, zip code, first language, or disability.