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LITERACY SUCCESS STORIES

The Illinois Early Literacy Coalition is embarking on a fascinating project, and we can’t wait to share the final product with you next month! Recently, an analysis in *The 74* mapped school districts across the country on a scatterplot depicting their literacy outcomes and poverty levels. The result? A “gold dot” designation for the school districts that are outperforming their expected literacy gains.

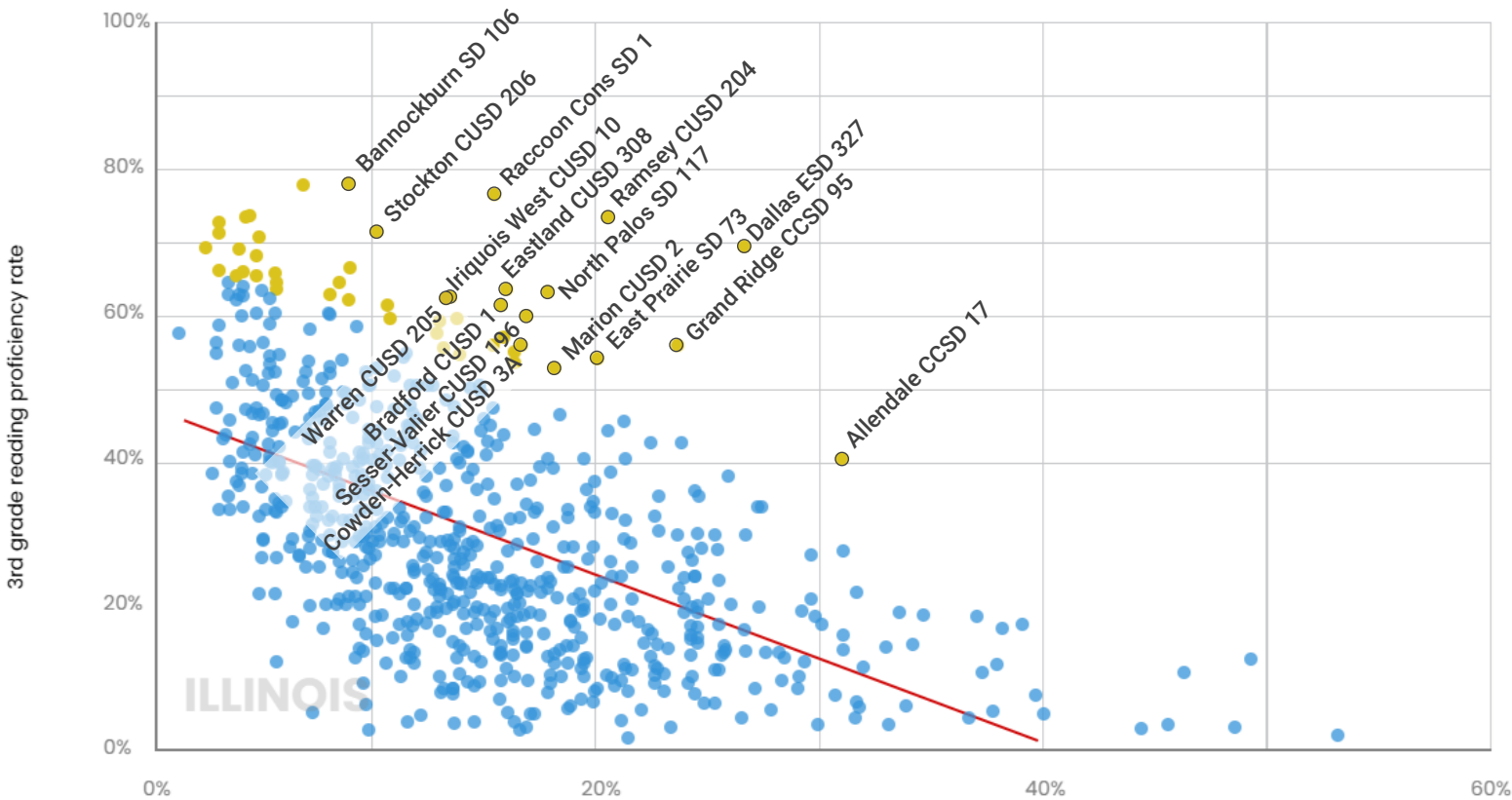
We reached out to a few of these superstars, plus some larger

districts that had recovered from their pandemic learning loss, to hear about their secret sauce. It was a fascinating endeavor.

Many credit their gains to shifts related to curriculum, more emphasis on writing, better teacher training, instructional coaches, and smarter grouping and intervention strategies. But others credited well-constructed Professional Learning Communities and data literacy to the improvement. One actually made small learning gains *during*

the pandemic, crediting their outcomes to prioritizing in-person instruction to the greatest extent possible and investing recovery funds on extended learning time and tutoring for students who most needed the extra support.

The common themes among all of them are intentionality, collaboration, and a mindset of continuous improvement. Stay tuned for the Illinois Early Learning Coalition report coming soon!



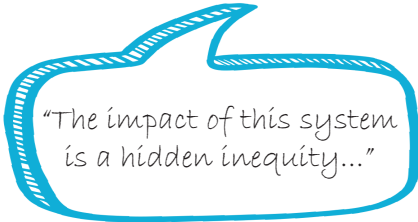
Source: Chad Aldeman analysis on *The 74*, “Which Schools Do the Best Job Teaching Kids to Read?,” school district labels added by us for each district outperforming its estimated proficiency by at least double.

TEACHER PENSION FUNDING IS PART OF FUNDING EQUITY

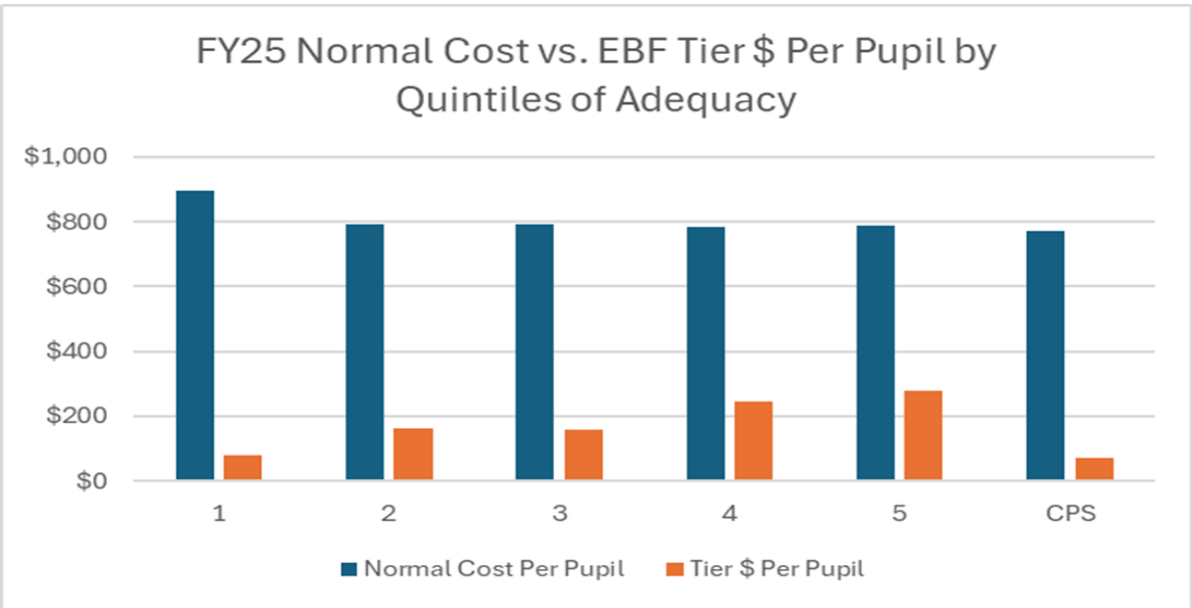
When the Evidence-Based Funding Formula (EBF) was enacted in 2017, numerous line items in the education budget were consolidated into a single funding stream that prioritizes distribution of resources to districts that are furthest from adequate funding. But there remains one large expenditure that is mostly disconnected from EBF and highly inequitable: TRS funding.

Outside of Chicago, teachers participate in the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS), funded by teachers’ own contributions of 9% of salary, a school district contribution of 0.52% of payroll, and the State for the remainder. School districts also pay associated costs for large end-of-career pay spikes. But for the most part, the State covers employee costs for school districts across the board -

regardless of how well funded the district is. The impact of this system is a hidden inequity, as better-funded districts receive a greater ‘in-kind’ benefit than poorer-funded districts—exactly the opposite of the goals of EBF.



Here’s why this is especially important: if Tier Two pensions see a benefit increase - which most everyone acknowledges has to happen at some point, there will also be school funding equity implications. A modification in the funding mechanism would be a wise addition to the bill, ensuring that state resources benefitting schools and their educators go out the door in an equitable way.



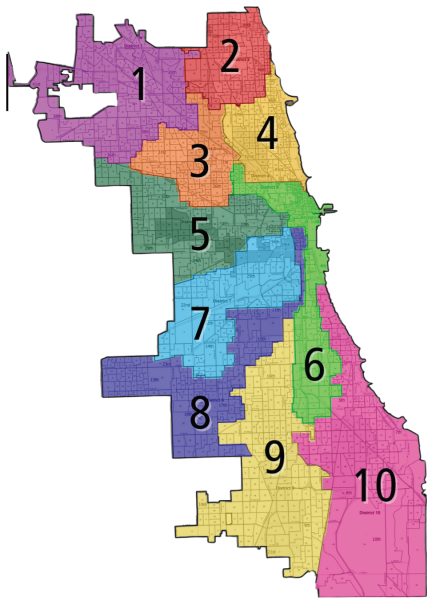
## THE RACE TO THE 2024 CHICAGO SCHOOL BOARD

This was a historic election for Chicago, with voters electing their first school board members ever. Initially, there was widespread support for creating a fully elected school board, which would allow Chicago residents to directly choose all members of the board. Advocates argued that this approach would increase accountability and reflect the diverse voices of the city’s neighborhoods. But the path to a fully elected board was not an easy one.

In 2021, a compromise was struck: the city would establish a hybrid board composed of 10 elected members and 11 members appointed by the mayor. This compromise sought to balance community input with the continuity of mayoral oversight, providing a more democratic structure while maintaining some degree of centralized authority. The hybrid model was seen as a middle ground that could accommodate both advocates for local control and those who supported sustaining mayoral influence and accountability over CPS.

Despite the compromise, the implementation of the new governance structure was not without challenges, including the determination of the school board district boundaries which had to reflect Chicago's vast and diverse population.

Most Illinois school districts are elected at-large, but we found at least nine Illinois districts that also vote in subdistricts.\* Some of these were mandated by consent decrees, while others may have been part of consolidation agreements. But only in Chicago is the state legislature responsible for drawing the boundaries – a task in which the legislature invited significant public input and invested much time.



Questions about compensation for board members, as well as the rules governing petition requirements for candidates were also raised during legislative hearings. Community members and activists demanded that these issues be addressed in a way that would ensure fair representation for all neighborhoods, especially for historically underserved

communities. Ultimately, CPS school board members – like all other Illinois school board members – will serve without compensation.

After months of hearings and negotiations, a final version of the bill was introduced in April 2024, setting the stage for the upcoming 2025 election and marking the culmination of years of advocacy and compromise. The 2024 election for the new hybrid board featured 31 candidates on the ballot, each vying for one of the 10 district seats. Additionally, there were 4 write-in candidates, who were among the 16 petition-filers disqualified from the official ballot. Campaigns saw significant financial investment, with over \$7 million spent on advertisements, outreach, and other election-related activities.

But voter awareness was still a challenge. A mid-October Kids First Chicago poll found half of voters were not aware school board candidates were on the ballot. The school board candidates were buried at the bottom of the ballot, which election officials

estimated took 15 minutes for voters to fill out. Of the 930,808 ballots cast, 735,953 voted for their school board candidate – meaning nearly 200,000 voters dropped off before casting their school board vote. However, setting the election to coincide with the presidential saw 62% voter turnout – significantly higher than most school board races that are set in the municipal elections.

“...nearly 200,000 voters dropped off before casting their vote.”

To address this information gap, Stand Illinois, teamed up with several local education groups to develop a voter education website, [votecps.org](https://votecps.org), with a detailed map of the new school board districts, along with profiles of the candidates running for office. The survey and map were designed to make the process of navigating the election clearer and more accessible to Chicagoans, particularly those in communities that have traditionally had limited access to information about local elections.

visit [votecps.org](https://votecps.org) to learn about the Chicago School Board!

\*Rockford SD 205, Springfield SD 186, Peoria SD 150, Urbana SD 61, Crete-Monee 201U, CHSD 218 (SW suburbs), North Mac CUSD 34, Bureau Valley CUSD 340, and W. Carroll CUSD 314



END SCHOOL DISCIPLINE FINES AND FEES ONCE AND FOR ALL

A 2022 investigative series from the Chicago Tribune and Pro Publica found that between 2019-2021, 11,950 municipal tickets were issued to students across 141 Illinois high schools serving 86% of Illinois high school students. The report found that most high schools were issuing students tickets for municipal ordinance violations like vaping or disorderly conduct. Black students were twice as likely to receive a ticket than white students, and not all Illinois high schools use municipal tickets as a form of school discipline, resulting in a patchwork of justice across the state.



Municipal tickets require a student to miss classroom time to attend a municipal hearing, resulting in a new form of exclusionary discipline. And to make matters worse students have no right to counsel or process for expungement and unpaid fines are being sent to collection agencies. The fines and fees, set by local governments, can vary widely with some municipalities charging students up to \$450 for a single violation.

Aside from missing class time, research tells us that fines and fees are not an

effective accountability tool, and can actually be harmful as a tool to prevent student vaping, one of the most commonly issued municipal tickets to students.

“...research tells us that fines and fees are not an effective accountability tool.”

New research on addiction treatment suggests that punitive measures like ticketing have little effect on ending substance use and “focusing on punishment rather than rehabilitation is likely to drive youth into a deeper, more secretive addiction—rather than seeking help from trusted teachers, coaches or other school staff in order to achieve recovery.” The American Lung Association’s INDEPTH program offers an alternative approach to punitive

discipline for addressing teen vaping by offering free training to educators so they are equipped to help students kick unhealthy addictions.

Last, but certainly not least, is the emotional toll of ticketing on students. In interviews with youth who received tickets they indicated they felt they were receiving adult punishments for common youthful misbehavior.

“focusing on punitive discipline rather than rehabilitation is likely to drive youth into a deeper, more secretive addicton...”

MEET THE POLICY FELLOWS: MARLA BAKER

Marla Baker’s daughter, Amara Harris, was having a normal day at school until she was accused of stealing another student’s AirPods in 2019. Despite Amara explaining to school administrators that the incident was a simple misunderstanding, the school’s resource officer still issued her a municipal ticket accompanied with a fine. Being a staunch advocate for her daughter’s rights, Marla decided to fight the ticket with Amara instead of letting her daughter be punished for something she didn’t do.

Though Marla and Amara won their case after four long years of over 30 court appearances, Marla shared that the damage to Amara’s wellbeing had already been done. “Despite her achievements as a high honor roll student, teacher assistant, and excelling as a cheerleader, her future was clouded by the threat of legal repercussions that could jeopardize her collegiate prospects and scholarships,” explained Baker. “She developed severe anxiety, depression, and lost trust in authority. This experience revealed a systemic issue:

the harsh and often discriminatory practices affecting students, particularly Black and brown children.”

Marla’s advocacy for fair and just discipline practices did not stop after winning her court case. She is continuing her fight to end punitive discipline practices as a member of Stand’s 2024-2025 Policy Fellowship. The fellowship’s goal is to address the impact of punitive discipline on students, families, and schools by exploring school discipline practices, including municipal ticketing, with an eye towards improving equity and education outcomes throughout the state.

“She developed severe anxiety, depression, and lost trust in authority. This experience revealed...the harsh and often discriminatory practices affecting students...”



Fellows are uncovering how consequences for non-criminal student misbehavior can be handled through a district’s discipline policy in a way that gives students a learning environment where they can receive discipline aimed at correcting their behavior and building their character, while also giving teachers the resources and support to implement this kind of discipline.

“Our children need leaders with hearts, not punitive measures that erode their trust in the system and cause them to feel demoralized.”

“Our children need leaders with hearts, not punitive measures that erode their trust in the system and cause them to feel demoralized.”

You can learn more about Marla and Amara’s story at [stand.org/illinois/our-stories/marla-baker/](https://stand.org/illinois/our-stories/marla-baker/).

ACROSS

- 1. Latch
- 6. Gets older
- 10. Employ
- 14. Cafe offering
- 15. Rant
- 16. Selves
- 17. Drive
- 18. Emperor
- 19. \*In Peoria or Italy?
- 20. Bro's sib
- 22. Cheer up
- 24. \_\_\_\_ degree
- 27. Factions
- 29. Melon exteriors
- 33. Eye component
- 35. Lab animal
- 36. \*In Kane or Switzerland?
- 37. \*In Adams or Peru?
- 38. \*In Johnson or Austria?
- 40. Weird
- 41. Film \_\_\_\_
- 43. Promise
- 45. Before
- 48. Point-keeper
- 50. Consumes
- 54. \*In Madison or Italy?
- 56. 45-inch measure
- 57. \*In Mason or England?
- 58. Bodily swelling
- 59. Ponderer
- 61. Cash out
- 62. Nervous system hub
- 64. Papa
- 66. Small dark berry
- 69. Glided
- 71. A young Brownie
- 75. Gyros ingredient
- 76. British art gallery
- 77. Aquatic mammal
- 78. Transcribe
- 79. Change from a five
- 80. Bird residences

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78					79					80				

DOWN

- 1. St. agency for ops
  - 2. Parking spaces
  - 3. Pass with flying colors
  - 4. \_\_\_\_ a Lady
  - 5. \*In Edgar or France?
  - 6. Curved path
  - 7. Like a Herald, Times, or Post
  - 8. Ass'ts
  - 9. Que \_\_\_\_
  - 10. Included in this text
  - 11. \_\_\_\_ to the hills when my heart is lonely (2 words)
  - 12. \_\_\_\_-com
  - 13. Not WNW
  - 21. Sacrifice
- 23. Reward
  - 24. Zilch
  - 25. Three-meaning prefix
  - 26. Msaculine pronoun
  - 28. \*In Alexander or Egypt?
  - 30. New
  - 31. Post-VHS, pre-DVR
  - 32. Upset
  - 34. \*In Logan/Mason or Costa Rica, with Jose
  - 36. Snaggled
  - 39. Gallagher and Fielding
  - 42. De la Renta or the Grouch
  - 44. Center
  - 45. \_\_\_\_ Maria
- 46. HS diploma alt.
  - 47. Four quarters
  - 49. Get together again
  - 51. Plant fluid
  - 52. Approx. arrival hour
  - 53. Timid
  - 55. Drink
  - 59. \*In Rock Island or Italy?
  - 60. Cancer-causing gas
  - 63. Concerning (2 words)
  - 65. Appointment
  - 66. Space neighbor
  - 67. Coral reef island
  - 68. Vol. increase
  - 70. \_\_\_\_ Plains
  - 72. Belonging to
  - 73. Array
  - 74. 12-mo. periods



ABOUT STAND FOR CHILDREN

Stand for Children is a unique catalyst for educational equity and racial justice to create a brighter future for us all.

STAND’S LEGISLATIVE TEAM