This fiscal year (July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2014), the state, local sources such as property taxes, and the federal government will provide more than $25 billion dollars to pre-K-12 education in Illinois. Education accounts for a large portion of the overall state budget and this fiscal year the state budget saw the largest budget for education the State Board has received since fiscal year 2009. The FY 2014 State Budget for Pre-K-12 education totals nearly $6.7 billion, an overall increase of $137 million from fiscal year 2013 appropriation levels. However, between FY 2009 to FY 2013, the state education budget experienced an overall drop of $852 million.

Much of the $137 million increase went toward funding General State Aid (GSA). The GSA formula supports local school districts’ general operations. Central to the GSA calculation is the “Foundation Level,” which is intended to represent the minimum level to adequately fund the education of a single pupil in the Illinois K-12 public school system. That Foundation Level has been set in statute at $6,119 per pupil since 2010. In recent years, however, funds appropriated for GSA have fallen short and districts have not received full reimbursement. As a result, GSA is once again being significantly prorated this school year by about 89 percent.

Besides General State Aid, local school districts rely on Mandated Categoricals, made up primarily of special education and transportation funding, which have also been decreasing in recent years. General State Aid and Mandated Categoricals account for almost 93 percent of all state funding for education, $4.4 billion and $1.7 billion respectively. The amount remaining is less than 8 percent or about $495 million that is available to be spent on funding for other programs. Of this amount, $300 million is allocated for the Early Childhood Block Grant, leaving $195 million for all other programs, including bilingual education, career and technical education, and regional safe schools.

**Student Demographics**

The number of operating school districts has decreased to 863 in 2013 from 886 in 2004. There are now 375 elementary districts, 99 high school districts, and 389 unit districts. The number of public schools has dropped to 3,862 in 2013 from 3,907 in 2004. The average school size has seen a slight increase to 532 students in 2013, up from 527 in 2004. Overall student enrollment in the regular Illinois public schools decreased from 2,060,048 in 2004 to 2,054,155 in 2013.

Meanwhile, Illinois is experiencing a significant increase in low-income students. Low-income students increased from 39 percent of the enrollment in 2004 to 49.9 percent in 2013. It was 49 percent in 2012. Pupils are considered low-income if they are from families receiving public aid, are living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, are being supported in foster homes with public funds, or are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

Students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, or Two or More Races made up 49.4 percent of the enrollment in 2013, up from 42.3 percent in 2004. The increase in minority percentage is accounted for mainly by increases among Hispanic students.

**Learning Outcomes**

ISBE unveiled a new Report Card in October 2013, showing that under higher performance levels for the state elementary test, students have made continued progress over time as well as from one year to the next. Eleventh graders also posted improved scores on the state’s high school assessment which includes the ACT college admissions test. The new School and District Report Card provides more information about student learning, reflecting the statewide move toward more rigor in the classroom and higher performance expectations at an earlier age to ensure Illinois K-12 students are on track for success in college and the work force.
Among the key new metrics on this year’s Report Card is “Student Academic Growth” by elementary school and district according to a new growth model using value tables that shows how much academic progress students have demonstrated from one year to the next in reading and math. The statewide average K-8 Student Academic Growth score for math is 101.4 and 102.1 for reading. In 2013, 1,823 schools (63 percent) have shown positive growth in reading and 1,620 schools (56 percent) have shown positive growth in math.

Statewide averages released in September showed the statewide composite for elementary students meeting and exceeding standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) dropped, going from 82.1 in 2012 to 61.9 in 2013, if science is included. The State Board raised expectations – or cut scores – on the ISAT’s math and reading proficiency expectations for the ISATs, given to third through eighth graders, to align with the more rigorous Common Core Learning Standards and to give a better indication of college and career readiness. The Board has not yet adopted new science standards and therefore has not raised performance expectations for the science portion of the ISATs, administered to fourth- and seventh-graders only.

The 2013 State Report Card lists the composite percentage of students meeting and exceeding for ISAT math and reading only (not including science) and a five-year analysis of past performance under the new cut scores show that the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards increased from 55.1 in 2009 to 58.8 in 2013. The percentage of students who met or exceeded ISAT math standards alone during that same five-year timeline increased from 55.3 percent to 58.7 in 2013, while the percent of students meeting or exceeding reading ISAT reading standards went from 79.8 in 2012 to 80.0 in 2013. The composite score for the PSAE, given to 11th graders, increased from 51.3 in 2012 to 51.9 in 2013, if science is included.

**Student Performance and Achievement**

On Aug. 21, the Illinois State Board of Education announced that the graduating Class of 2013 achieved a composite score of 20.6, giving Illinois the second highest score among the nine states in the country that test 100 percent of its graduates. Illinois’ ACT composite score is just slightly below the national average of 20.9, which is based primarily on the scores of self-selected college-bound students. The vast majority of states only test students intending to go to college as opposed to Illinois, where every 11th-grader is required to take the ACT as part of the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE).

Illinois has also shown steady progress over the past five years in improving college readiness with 25 percent of students meeting all four subject areas in 2012 and 2013 compared to 22 percent in 2009. To help increase the number of students who meet these College Readiness Benchmarks, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) adopted the more rigorous English language arts and mathematics Common Core standards in 2010 and raised the performance levels of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in 2013.

In February 2013, ISBE announced that the number of Illinois graduates who take AP exams during high school has more than doubled in the last decade, with low-income and minority students continuing to make record gains toward closing the achievement gap on these rigorous tests. In 2012, more than 26,400 graduates scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam, with 17.6 percent of these students coming from low-income backgrounds, according to the ninth annual AP Report to the Nation. AP exams measure a student’s content mastery of college-level studies in specific academic disciplines. A total of 40,653 graduates took at least one AP exam during high school in 2012 compared to 18,833 in 2002.

Illinois ranks 16th in the nation for the percentage of 2012 graduates – 19.9 percent – who scored at least a 3 on an AP exam during their high school career. The national average is 19.5 percent. Additionally, the percentage of Illinois graduates who reached that benchmark grew by 8.2 percentage points from 11.7 percent in 2002, putting Illinois among the top 20 states that had a larger percentage point change over time than the national average.