

CHAPTER IV

Too many students in the U.S. and in Illinois are not completing high school or are completing high school without the requisite knowledge and skills to be successful in college and/or the workplace.

READINESS FOR COLLEGE AND WORK

Keeping Illinois competitive requires students to exit from high school well prepared for college or qualified to obtain a livable-wage job. Unfortunately, across the nation this is not happening. The *American Diploma Project* found that approximately 40% of high school graduates felt ill prepared for college or the workforce.⁹⁷ Peter Hart in *Rising to the Challenge* found that 42% of the U.S. students are ill prepared for college, and 45% of the high school graduates lack the skills expected by employers.⁹⁸

This chapter examines the following student indicators of readiness for college and work:

- High school dropout and graduation rates
- Readiness for college
- Readiness of high school graduates for the workforce

These student indicators have been defined and measured using various methodologies. Each approach has a theoretical foundation but is limited by the lack of complete data. It is common for multiple but differing statistics to describe dropout rates, graduation rates, and levels of readiness. For example, Illinois graduation rates range from 86% to less than 70%, depending upon the approach. The National Governors Association, Achieve, and other organizations have proposed a longitudinal data system that would allow more standardization of student achievement indicators and appropriate comparisons across states. The goal is to have the data system in place for all 50 states by 2009.⁹⁹ This chapter discusses Illinois student data using some of the more common measures.

Regardless of the method or the metric, the interpretation of the data is very similar: too many students in the U.S. and in Illinois are not completing high school or are completing high school without the requisite knowledge and skills to be successful in college and/or the workplace. Gaps in the readiness indicators are most pronounced for low-income, black, and Hispanic students, especially male students.