



EDUCATION - PUBLIC & PRIVATE

Introduction & Background

Education is an essential component of any community and should be included in a comprehensive plan because it's a contributing factor to why people may choose to move to one particular area over others. Education shapes and prepares a city's young residents for the future by providing a foundation for social and fiscal success, as well as personal and professional development that can lead to post-secondary educational opportunities. The inclusion of an education section in a comprehensive plan contributes to the holistic picture of the region and creates space to address community gaps, as well as strengths and opportunities for continued success.

It can be difficult to address all aspects of education within a comprehensive plan because only so many metrics can be measured. Education metrics serve as an indicator and are helpful in gaining a holistic understanding of any community. It is important to note that these metrics are not always comparable on a broad scale due to different programs, testing formats and requirements across the nation. Additionally, not all types of intelligence and skills are able to be measured in academic settings. Further yet, other factors that cannot easily be shown through standard education metrics are the burdens and controversies associated with some education systems, such as equity, boundary line determinations, income concentrations, access to funding, and capacity building.

History of Rockford Public Schools (K-12)

The City of Rockford is primarily served by the Rockford School District 205 (RPS205). The other areas are served by either Harlem School District 122 or Winnebago Community Unit School District 323. RPS205 is one of the largest school districts in Illinois, educating approximately 28,000 students annually from early childhood through high school. RPS205 has a long history, with both successes and challenges. In recent years new programs offer greater chances of success and improved opportunities to attend college locally with free tuition paid for by the Rockford Promise program.

Originally, public schools in the city were divided by the Rock River into two separate districts, one on the east side and one on the west side. These two districts were combined in 1884 to form the current Rockford school district.ⁱ As the City of Rockford grew in population, overcrowding began to occur during the late 1800s, leading to the expansion and construction of additional facilities to meet the growing demand. Rockford grew significantly in geographic size and population between the late 1930s and 1950s. To accommodate this growth, several neighborhood elementary and junior high schools were constructed as new neighborhoods were built. Additional high schools were also needed, resulting in the construction of three new high schools throughout the city, including Auburn High School (1960), Guilford High School (1963), and Jefferson High School (1969).

By the late 1980s, RPS205 was facing financial issues due to the size of the district in both terms of geographic coverage and the number of students served. In 1989, the Rockford School Board voted to pass a plan reducing district costs, titled “Together Toward a Brighter Tomorrow.” However, this plan was controversial as it would mean the closure of several schools and consolidating already under-served, displaced minority student populations. Community members formed a group called “People Who Care” and filed a federal class action lawsuit in 1989. RPS205 and the plaintiffs reached an agreement to reopen several elementary schools that were slated to close, invest in schools located in the southwest side of the city, and consider reopening one high school. This would be financed by a tax levy.ⁱⁱ However, RPS205 was not able to meet the first agreement requirements, resulting in another agreement through the courts. This second agreement was larger in scale, requiring the district to review its discipline and fairness procedures, open Marsh and Riverdahl Schools, replace Church School with a global studies academy, and implement specific academic programs for at-risk elementary students in predominately minority schools.

However, legal issues surrounding public education in the city continued, when a second lawsuit was filed by plaintiffs alleging decades of discrimination against minority students. The findings of this trial include the lack of integration among Rockford Public Schools, lack of minority teachers, lower quality facilities and equipment in high minority schools, educational tracking issues, and misinformed and isolating programming.ⁱⁱⁱ This trial resulted in a Comprehensive Remedial Order from the presiding judge, however, main components of this order were struck down by the appellate court under the condition that the district close the achievement gap between white and minority students, as well as meet quotas for minority faculty members.

These lawsuits resulted in RPS205 implementing a ‘choice’ program, where students could pick the top three schools of their preference and then be placed by the racial composition of the school. However, the ‘choice’ program model was discontinued in 2010. RPS205 students are now placed according to neighborhood school boundaries.^{iv} In 2020, neighborhood school boundaries were updated to account for recent overcrowding and capacity issues at a few of the elementary schools including Brookview, Riverdahl, and West View.^v If the city does grow in the future additional school capacity should be discussed and planned for accordingly.

Rockford Public Schools Today

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the school district here as it has across the rest of the nation. The pandemic has brought new challenges for educators, students, and parents. As a result, RPS205 has shifted how it operates and serves the community. In an effort to ensure the safety and health of their students, RPS205 followed recommendations from the Illinois State Board of Education and Illinois Department of Public Health by offering hybrid, in-person, and online learning opportunities when required. The determination of hybrid, in-person, or online classroom formatting was based on the student’s age and infection rate age tiers, and instruction from the State of Illinois. For a significant time, all in-person instruction required that students and faculty wear masks and social distance in public.^{vi} In February of 2022, RPS205 lifted its mask requirement for in person students at all schools.

Rockford Public School District 205 was the 3rd largest school district in the State of Illinois in 2022.^{vii} Today, RPS205 has a total of 41 schools and a few gifted programs, currently educating approximately 28,000 students through early childhood and preschool programs all the way to high school and adult education programs. Several early childhood centers are available for pre-kindergarten students. There are also several charter schools and academies that provide students with a wide range of special programming for more innovative and higher quality educational opportunities.^{viii}

RPS offers special programs for students at Maria Montessori at Marsh (self-guided learning), STEAM Academy at Haskell (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math), Two-Way Language Immersion at Barbour, Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall School and Auburn High School, and Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) at Auburn High school (Dance, Instrumental Music, Theatre-Tech, and Media Arts, Vocal Music and Visual Arts).^{ix}

Roosevelt Community Education Center serves high school students, pre-kindergarten and adult education, and has a daycare facility as well. Roosevelt focuses on developing relationships and creative learning opportunities to help students pursue their full post-secondary potential.^x Roosevelt partners with Rock Valley College to offer 16 dual-credit courses and students participate in work-based learning within one of 12 career pathways.

Rockford Public Schools sets curriculum for public schools in the district and students are assigned public schools based on where they live. In contrast, charter schools are independent of the school district and create

an approved mission and curriculum specific to that school.^{xi} This flexibility allows charter schools to be more innovative with programming but also puts more responsibility on charter schools to perform well. Charter schools are usually tuition free and publicly funded. Any student can attend, as there are no restrictions based on where they live, but there may be special requirements to attend and the interest can be high at times.

| Rockford Public Schools | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|--|--------|
| | Grades | | Grades |
| Beyer Early Childhood Center | PK | Spring Creek Elementary School | K-5 |
| Fairview Early Childhood Center | PK | Washington Elementary School | K-5 |
| Nashold Early Childhood Center | PK | Welsh Elementary School | K-5 |
| Summerdale Early Childhood Center | PK | West View Elementary School | K-5 |
| Maria Montessori Elementary School | PK-8 | Whitehead Elementary School | K-5 |
| Roosevelt Center | PK-12 | Jackson Charter School | K-5 |
| Bloom Elementary School | K-5 | Barbour Two-Way Language Immersion | K-8 |
| Brookview Elementary School | K-5 | Galapagos Rockford Charter School | K-8 |
| Carlson Elementary School | K-5 | Legacy Academy Of Excellence | K-12 |
| Cherry Valley Elementary School | K-5 | Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall Elementary | 1-4 |
| Conklin Elementary School | K-5 | Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall School | 5-8 |
| Constance Lane Elementary School | K-5 | Eisenhower Middle School | 6-8 |
| Ellis Elementary School | K-5 | Flinn Middle School | 6-8 |
| Froberg Elementary School | K-5 | Kennedy Middle School | 6-8 |
| Gregory Elementary School | K-5 | Lincoln Middle School | 6-8 |
| Hillman Elementary School | K-5 | Rockford Environmental Science Academy | 6-8 |
| Johnson Elementary School | K-5 | West Middle School | 6-8 |
| Lathrop Elementary School | K-5 | Auburn High School | 9-12 |
| Lewis Lemon Elementary | K-5 | East High School | 9-12 |
| Mcintosh Elementary | K-5 | Guilford High School | 9-12 |
| Riverdahl Elementary School | K-5 | Jefferson High School | 9-12 |
| Rolling Green | K-5 | | |

Source: Illinois Report Card 2021 Data

Map of School Districts

Five school districts are fully or partially located within the city of Rockford, including Rockford School District 205, Harlem School District 122, Pecatonica Unit School District 321, Meridian School District 223, and Winnebago Unit School District 323. Rockford School District covers the largest number of Rockford residents within the city limits, with the other four districts located along the outskirts.

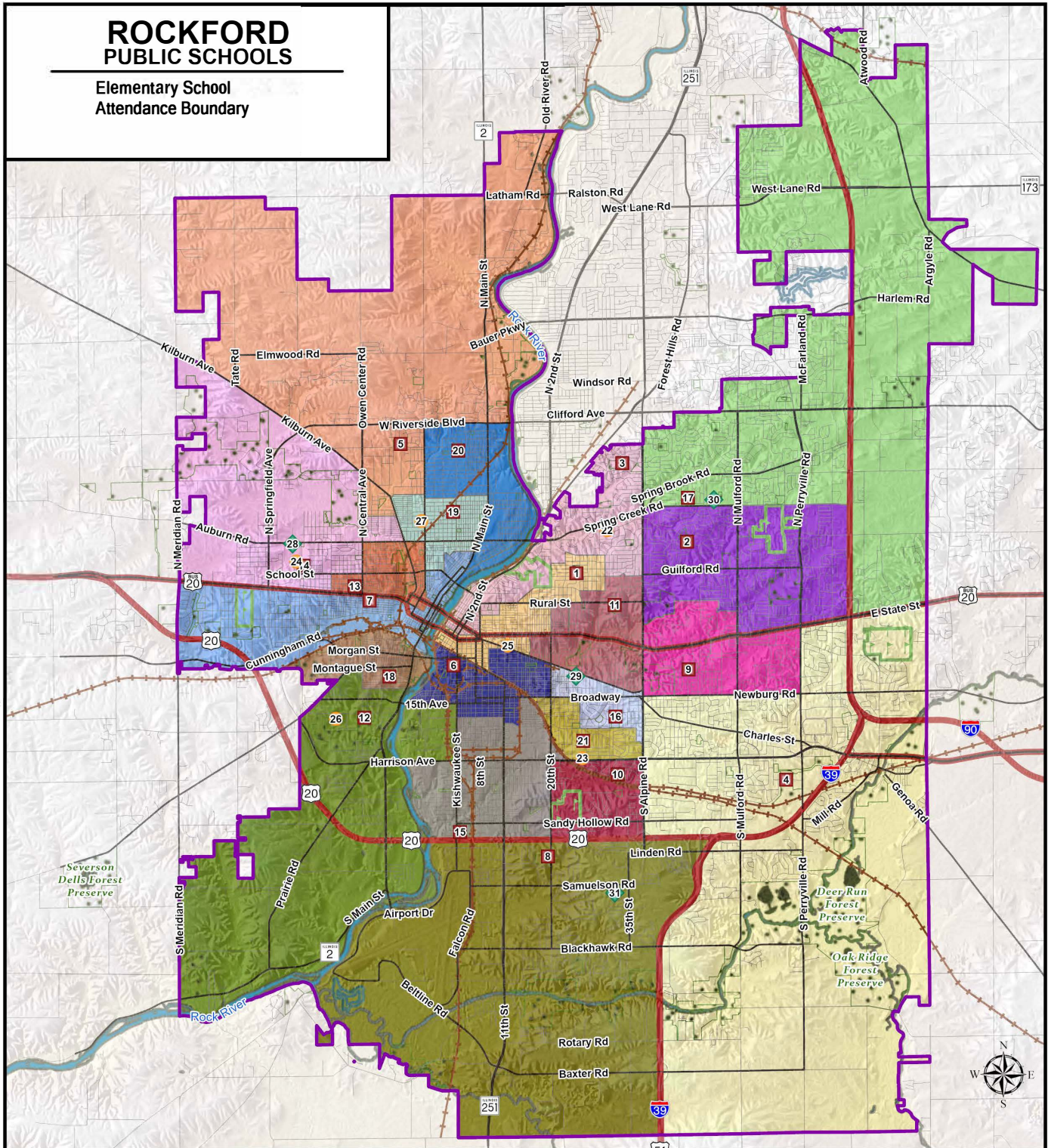
The four public high schools are dispersed throughout the city, with Auburn High School located in the southwest, East High School located in the city center, Guilford High School in the northeast, and Jefferson High School to the south.

The private schools are mostly concentrated in the northern portion of the city, including Boylan Catholic High School and Rockford Lutheran High School; Keith County Day School is located just north of downtown, and Rockford Christian schools and Christian Life are located more towards the east and northeast.



ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Elementary School Attendance Boundary



- District Boundary
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- Forest
- Park
- Golf

Mapping data provided by Winnebago County, Rockford Public Schools, Illinois DNR, IDOT, US Census Bureau, and ESRI.
Map created December 2020 by RSP & Associates, LLC.

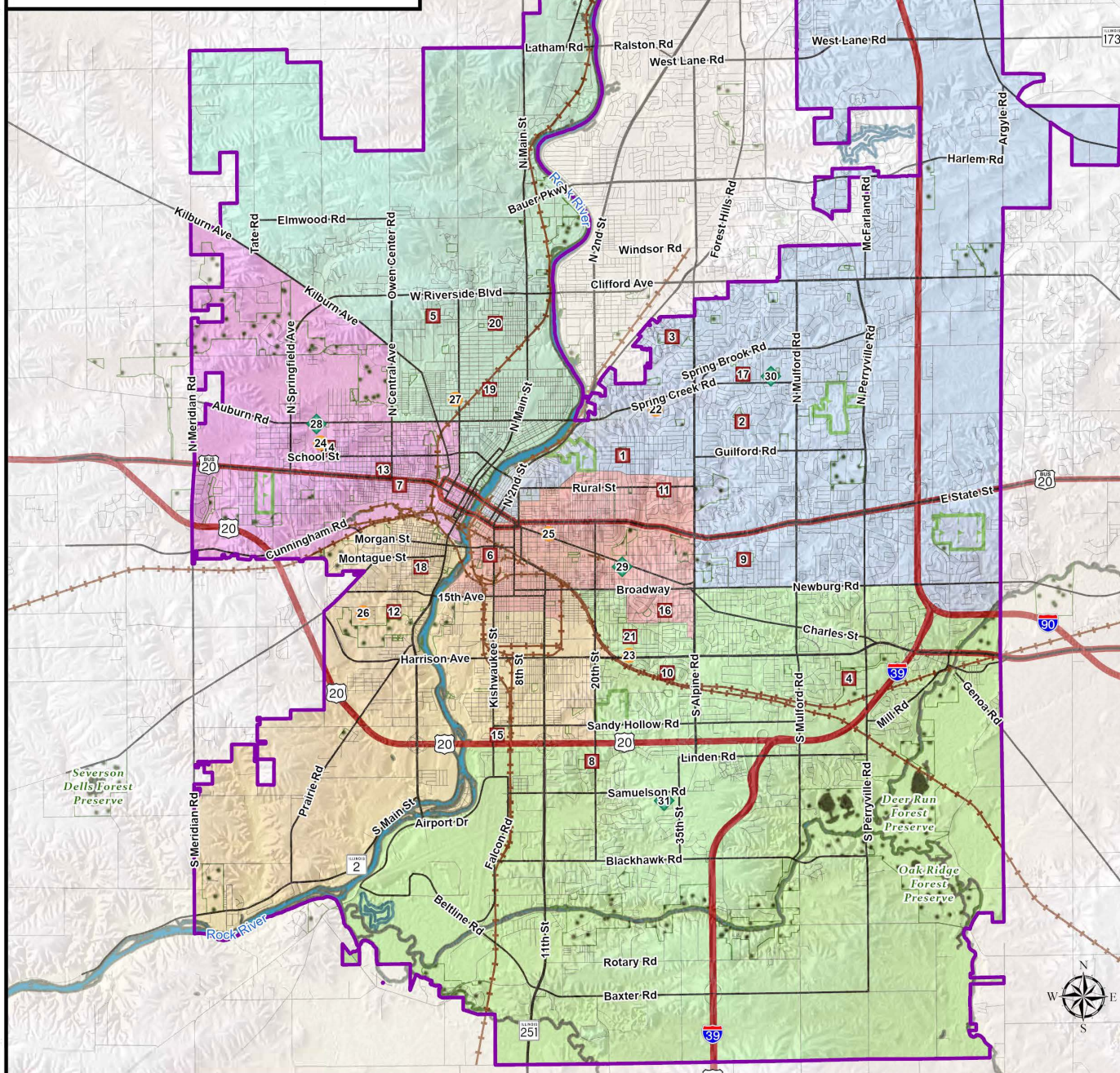
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| | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Elementary Schools | | | |
| 1. Bloom Elementary | 11. Johnson Elementary | 21. Whitehead Elementary | 29. East High |
| 2. Brookview Elementary | 12. Lathrop Elementary | Middle Schools | |
| 3. Carlson Elementary | 13. Lewis Lemon Elementary | 22. Eisenhower Middle | 30. Guilford High |
| 4. Cherry Valley Elementary | 14. McIntosh Elementary | 23. Flinn Middle | 31. Jefferson High |
| 5. Conklin Elementary | 15. Riverdahl Elementary | 24. Kennedy Middle | |
| 6. Constance Lane Elementary | 16. Rolling Green Elementary | 25. Lincoln Middle | |
| 7. Ellis Elementary | 17. Spring Creek Elementary | 26. RESA Middle | |
| 8. Froberg Elementary | 18. Washington Elementary | 27. West Middle | |
| 9. Gregory Elementary | 19. Welsh Elementary | High Schools | |
| 10. Hillman Elementary | 20. West View Elementary | 28. Auburn High | |

ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Middle School Attendance Boundary



- District Boundary
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- Forest
- Park
- Golf

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Elementary Schools | | | |
| 1. Bloom Elementary | 11. Johnson Elementary | 21. Whitehead Elementary | 29. East High |
| 2. Brookview Elementary | 12. Lathrop Elementary | Middle Schools | 30. Guilford High |
| 3. Carlson Elementary | 13. Lewis Lemon Elementary | 22. Eisenhower Middle | 31. Jefferson High |
| 4. Cherry Valley Elementary | 14. McIntosh Elementary | 23. Flinn Middle | |
| 5. Conklin Elementary | 15. Riverdahl Elementary | 24. Kennedy Middle | |
| 6. Constance Lane Elementary | 16. Rolling Green Elementary | 25. Lincoln Middle | |
| 7. Ellis Elementary | 17. Spring Creek Elementary | 26. RESA Middle | |
| 8. Froberg Elementary | 18. Washington Elementary | 27. West Middle | |
| 9. Gregory Elementary | 19. Welsh Elementary | High Schools | |
| 10. Hillman Elementary | 20. West View Elementary | 28. Auburn High | |

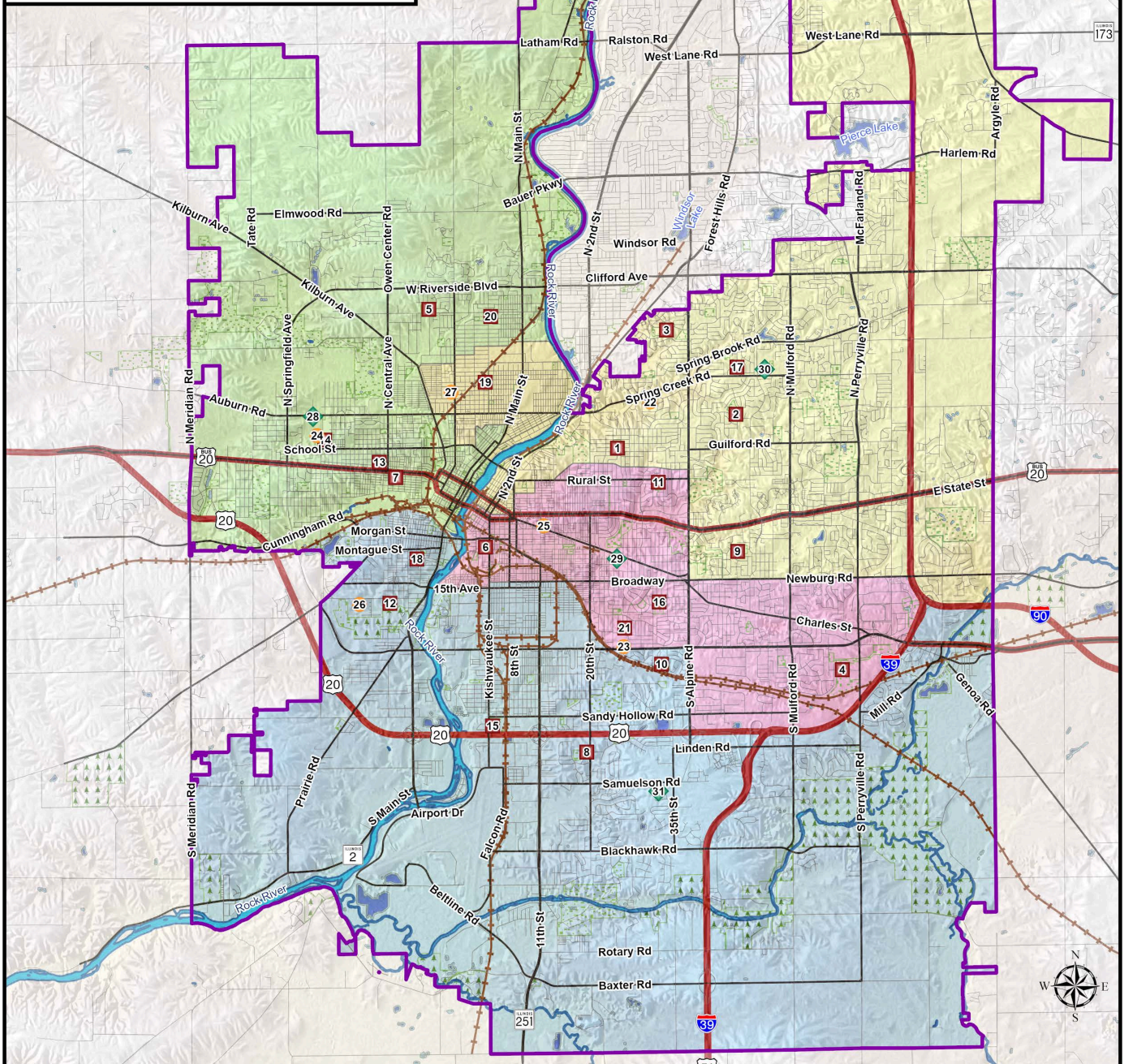
Mapping data provided by Winnebago County, Rockford Public Schools, Illinois DNR, IDOT, US Census Bureau, and ESRI. Map created December 2020 by RSP & Associates, LLC.

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ROCKFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

High School Attendance Areas



- District Boundary
- Elementary Schools
- Middle Schools
- High Schools
- Forest
- Park

| Elementary Schools | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Bloom Elementary | 11. Johnson Elementary | 21. Whitehead Elementary | 29. East High |
| 2. Brookview Elementary | 12. Lathrop Elementary | Middle Schools | |
| 3. Carlson Elementary | 13. Lewis Lemon Elementary | 22. Eisenhower Middle | 30. Guilford High |
| 4. Cherry Valley Elementary | 14. McIntosh Elementary | 23. Flinn Middle | 31. Jefferson High |
| 5. Conklin Elementary | 15. Riverdahl Elementary | 24. Kennedy Middle | |
| 6. Constance Lane Elementary | 16. Rolling Green Elementary | 25. Lincoln Middle | |
| 7. Ellis Elementary | 17. Spring Creek Elementary | 26. RESA Middle | |
| 8. Froberg Elementary | 18. Washington Elementary | 27. West Middle | |
| 9. Gregory Elementary | 19. Welsh Elementary | High Schools | |
| 10. Hillman Elementary | 20. West View Elementary | 28. Auburn High | |

Mapping data provided by Winnebago County, Rockford Public Schools, Illinois DNR, IDOT, US Census Bureau, and ESRI. Map created January 2020 by RSP & Associates, LLC.

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Private Schools (K-12)

In addition to public schools the city's residents are also served by 36 private schools accommodating students from pre-school to high school. While these private schools serve students throughout the entire city and the region, the schools are primarily concentrated in northern portions of the city.

| Rockford Private Schools | | | |
|---|--------|---|--------|
| | Grades | | Grades |
| Montesorri Private Academy | NS-9 | Christan Life Schools | PK-12 |
| East Riverside KinderCare | PK | Easterseals Academy | PK-12 |
| Maray Drive KinderCare | PK | Keith Country Day School | PK-12 |
| Northridge KinderCare | PK | North Love Christian School | PK-12 |
| Rockford KinderCare | PK | Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Academy | PK-12 |
| Alpine Academy | PK-5 | Regents Christian Academy | PK-12 |
| St. Paul Cogie Academy | PK-5 | Rockford Christian Schools | PK-12 |
| Faith Academy | PK-6 | Rockford Iqra School | PK-12 |
| Allegro Academy | PK-7 | CICS Jackson Charter School | K-5 |
| Cathedral of St. Peter School | PK-8 | Action Academy Rockford | K-8 |
| Holy Family Catholic School | PK-8 | Alpine Christian School | K-9 |
| Spectrum Progressive School of Rockford | PK-8 | Harvest Time Christian Academy | K-12 |
| St. Edward School | PK-8 | Kikifer's Entrepreneurial Academy | K-12 |
| St. James Catholic School | PK-8 | Beautiful Beginnings Community Outreach | 6-12 |
| St. Paul Academy | PK-8 | Rockford Lutheran Junior/Senior High School | 6-12 |
| St. Paul Lutheran School | PK-8 | Veritas Christi Hybrid Academy | 6-12 |
| St. Rita Catholic School | PK-8 | Boylan Catholic High School | 9-12 |
| Berean Baptist Christian Schools | PK-12 | | |
| Cathedral Baptist School | PK-12 | | |

Source: Private School Review Data.com

Regional Overview

There are just over 80 schools serving prekindergarten through 12th grade located throughout the City of Rockford with over 40,000 students at least 3 years old enrolled through all levels in 2019. Looking at total enrollment numbers by grade cohorts within RPS 205 there are just over 8,200 students enrolled in 1st-4th grades, just under 8,300 students enrolled in 5th-8th grades, and about 7,800 students enrolled in 9th-12th grades. Within private schools, grade size increases consistently from

| School Enrollment by Grade (2019) | Total | | In Public School | | In Private School | |
|--|--------|---------|------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|
| | Total | Percent | Count | Percent | Count | Percent |
| Nursery school, preschool | 2,867 | 7.1% | 2,349 | 6.9% | 518 | 8.3% |
| Kindergarten | 2,503 | 6.2% | 1,990 | 5.9% | 513 | 8.2% |
| Elementary: grade 1 to grade 4 | 9,163 | 22.8% | 8,257 | 24.3% | 906 | 14.5% |
| Elementary: grade 5 to grade 8 | 9,366 | 23.3% | 8,282 | 24.4% | 1,084 | 17.3% |
| High school: grade 9 to grade 12 | 8,926 | 22.2% | 7,801 | 23.0% | 1,125 | 18.0% |
| College, undergraduate | 5,650 | 14.0% | 4,214 | 12.4% | 1,436 | 23.0% |
| Graduate, professional school | 1,754 | 4.4% | 1,088 | 3.2% | 666 | 10.7% |
| Population 3 years and over enrolled in school | 40,229 | | 33,981 | | 6,248 | |

Source: Private School Review Data.com & Illinois Report Card, 2021/2019

nursery school to grade 12, as seen in the school enrollment by grade table. Of course, the overall number of students in private schools is much less than in public schools, as not everyone has the means to attend.

As mentioned previously, the city is served by four public high schools: Auburn High School, East High School, Guilford High School and Jefferson High School, and several private schools, including Boylan Catholic High School, Rockford Lutheran High School, Rockford Christian, Christian Life, and Keith Country Day School. Auburn High School had the highest enrollment, followed by Rockford East, Guilford, and finally Jefferson. Looking specifically at RPS's secondary schools, data shows student enrollment declines as grade levels increase, with almost double the number of 9th graders as 12th graders. This is partially due to those graduating early, those that may transfer out of the district, or drop out altogether.

Enrollment, graduation rates, and test scores vary among the public high schools. Overall RPS205 has seen a steady enrollment between roughly 28,100 and 28,700 students over the last five years. According to the Illinois Report Card, RPS spent an average of \$7,400 per student on instruction in 2018, falling a little short of the state average of \$8,172 per student.

The overall graduation rate for RPS was 66 percent in 2019. This is significantly lower than the state and national graduation rates, which were both 86 percent in 2019. The RPS205 graduation rate dropped even further in 2021 to 64.4 percent.^{xii} Many factors can affect student enrollment and graduation. One factor influencing the graduation and enrollment rates is student mobility, or the percentage of students who transfer in or out of school during the school year. In the 2018-2019 school year, 15 percent of students in RPS transferred schools, which was double the state's rate of 7 percent. The more recent drop may be associated to the pandemic.



Jefferson High School Graduation - 2021

Student Diversity & Assessment

The Rockford Public School District serves a diverse range of students in terms of race, ethnicity, income, and language spoken at home. This diversity is especially seen in the racial and ethnic composition of the district with 71 percent of the students from a minority background. Looking at 2019 numbers, 32 percent of students enrolled in RPS205 were black or African American, 29 percent were White, 28 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent identified as two or more races, and 4 percent were Asian. The student population is expected to continue being racially and ethnically diverse as the city's total population also becomes more diverse, which follows national trends.

Rockford Public Schools also have a high percentage of students from families with a low income (64 percent) in 2019. Students, ages 3 to 17, meet the low-income criteria if they or their household receives public aid in the form of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) or TANF (Targeted Assistance for Needy Families); are classified as homeless, migrant, runaway, in the Head Start program, or foster children; or live in a household where the household income meets (USDA) guidelines to receive free or reduced-price meals. It is important to address the needs of these students as there are identified gaps in academic achievement between those who are raised in poverty and those who are not. Students who are living in poverty may have a more stressful home life or assist in supporting their families financially. It is important that school and community leaders are aware how poverty impacts student behavior and learning capacity in the classroom and can stifle academic achievements.^{xiii}

Seventeen percent of all students enrolled in RPS205 are English learners, meaning their primary language is not English. These students may receive English language instruction as a part of their education to target individual learning needs. Looking specifically at the secondary schools, Auburn High School has the lowest percentage (2 percent) of students whose primary language is not English, while Rockford East has the highest percentage (17 percent) of students who are English learners. Of the students that are considered low income the percent of English learners jumps to 64%. This puts already disadvantaged students at an even higher risk of being unsuccessful.

| High School Enrollment by Ethnicity (2019) | White | Black | Hispanic | American Indian | Asian | Two or More Races | Pacific Islander |
|--|-------|-------|----------|-----------------|-------|-------------------|------------------|
| Auburn High School | 29% | 41% | 20% | 0% | 4% | 6% | 0% |
| Guilford High School | 38% | 24% | 27% | 0% | 4% | 7% | 0% |
| Jefferson High School | 24% | 21% | 46% | 0% | 3% | 5% | 0% |
| Rockford East High School | 30% | 28% | 28% | 0% | 8% | 7% | 0% |
| All Grades RPS205 | 29% | 32% | 28% | 0% | 4% | 7% | 0% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

| Student Demographics by High School (2019) | Low Income | English Learners |
|--|------------|------------------|
| Auburn High School | 62% | 2% |
| Guilford High School | 51% | 10% |
| Jefferson High School | 69% | 14% |
| Rockford East High School | 66% | 17% |
| Rockford School District 205 | 64% | 17% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data



The Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) is a federally-required measure of the number of students meeting the Illinois Learning Standards in English language, arts and mathematics. IAR results are typically used to measure student growth as well as school and district accountability, and is administered to students between 3rd and 8th grades. In 2019, the median of the percentage of RPS students that did not meet IAR expectations was 34 percent, while 27 percent partially met expectations, 13 percent met expectations, and only 1 percent exceeded expectations when looking at the median of the average test scores.^{xiv} Of the schools within RPS, Thurgood Marshall Private School had the highest percentage of students meeting IAR expectations at 55 percent and 40 percent exceeding expectations. In contrast, several schools within the district had at least 50 percent or more students not meeting IAR expectations in 2019. This disparity should be addressed.

| Illinois Assessment of Readiness by School (2019) | | | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------|------------|-----|----------|
| | Did Not Meet | Partially Met | Approached | Met | Exceeded |
| Lincoln Middle School | 40% | 26% | 22% | 12% | 1% |
| Flinn Middle School | 34% | 26% | 29% | 10% | 1% |
| Eisenhower Middle School | 25% | 23% | 26% | 22% | 4% |
| Kennedy Middle School | 48% | 27% | 15% | 5% | 0% |
| West Middle School | 35% | 29% | 25% | 10% | 1% |
| Froberg Elementary School | 19% | 22% | 24% | 32% | 2% |
| Barbour Two-Way Language Immersion | 35% | 31% | 27% | 8% | 0% |
| Brookview Elementary School | 24% | 22% | 26% | 26% | 2% |
| Bloom Elementary School | 33% | 27% | 27% | 13% | 0% |
| Cherry Valley Elementary School | 23% | 27% | 28% | 22% | 1% |
| Carlson Elementary School | 24% | 34% | 25% | 17% | 1% |
| Conklin Elementary School | 44% | 22% | 22% | 10% | 1% |
| Constance Lane Elementary School | 51% | 29% | 13% | 6% | 1% |
| Ellis Elementary School | 52% | 28% | 16% | 3% | 0% |
| Gregory Elementary School | 28% | 29% | 23% | 19% | 1% |
| Haskell Elementary School | 45% | 26% | 22% | 7% | 1% |
| Lathrop Elementary School | 34% | 31% | 25% | 10% | 0% |
| Lewis Lemon Elementary | 62% | 22% | 10% | 6% | 0% |
| Johnson Elementary School | 29% | 25% | 26% | 20% | 1% |
| Mcintosh Elementary | 48% | 32% | 18% | 2% | 0% |
| Maria Montessori Elementary School | 24% | 21% | 34% | 20% | 1% |
| Welsh Elementary School | 54% | 26% | 13% | 7% | 0% |
| Riverdahl Elementary School | 41% | 31% | 19% | 9% | 1% |
| Rockford Environmental Science Academy | 39% | 28% | 20% | 13% | 1% |
| Rolling Green | 33% | 24% | 26% | 18% | 0% |
| Spring Creek Elementary School | 18% | 20% | 31% | 27% | 4% |
| Hillman Elementary School | 37% | 30% | 23% | 11% | 0% |
| Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall Elementary | 1% | 3% | 16% | 50% | 29% |
| Gifted Academy at Thurgood Marshall School | 0% | 0% | 4% | 55% | 40% |
| Washington Elementary School | 47% | 30% | 13% | 10% | 0% |
| West View Elementary School | 32% | 31% | 20% | 16% | 1% |
| Whitehead Elementary School | 30% | 31% | 24% | 14% | 0% |
| Galapagos Rockford Charter School | 32% | 24% | 24% | 19% | 2% |
| Jackson Charter School | 48% | 31% | 15% | 6% | 0% |
| Legacy Academy Of Excellence | 32% | 28% | 25% | 15% | 0% |
| Median Value of All | 34% | 27% | 23% | 13% | 1% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

Another testing standard used to gauge academic achievement is the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). This test is often used for admissions by universities as a way to determine a student's level of college readiness in Math, English, and Language Arts.^{xv} Rockford Public Schools had 17 percent of students meet the SAT standards and only 5 percent exceeding standards when looking at the mean of the schools average as a whole. Auburn High School and Guilford High School had the highest average SAT scores.

Measuring if a student is "on track" by the end of ninth grade is another measure of academic achievement used in Illinois. Students identified as "on track" have earned at least five full-year course credits (10 semester credits) and have earned no more than one "F" in a core course (English, math, science, or social science). Students who finish the ninth-grade year on track are almost four times more likely to graduate from high school than students who are not. In 2019, RPS205 had 63 percent of students in ninth grade on track, with the remaining at risk of not graduating. This number improved to 68% in 2021.^{xvi}

| Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) by School (2019) | | | | |
|---|-----------------|-------------|-------|---------|
| | Partially Meets | Approaching | Meets | Exceeds |
| Auburn High School | 37% | 30% | 21% | 12% |
| Guilford High School | 42% | 34% | 19% | 5% |
| Jefferson High School | 51% | 32% | 14% | 2% |
| Rockford East High School | 46% | 38% | 14% | 2% |
| | | | | |
| Rockford School District 205 | 44% | 33% | 17% | 4% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

| 9th Grade on Track by School (2019) | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| School | Students |
| Auburn High School | 58% |
| Guilford High School | 74% |
| Jefferson High School | 66% |
| Rockford East High School | 57% |
| | |
| Rockford School District 205 | 63% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

RPS205 has approximately 24 percent of its students enrolled in early college courses as of 2019. In total, there were 5,156 advanced placement exams taken by RPS205 students with only 2,456 resulting in college credits. Auburn High School had the most advanced placement exams resulting in college credits, making up 76 percent of the district's total.

As previously mentioned, the overall graduation rate for RPS was 66 percent in 2019. Guilford High School had the highest graduation rate of 71 percent, while Auburn High School had the lowest graduation rate of 63 percent. A high school diploma is vital both for students who plan to enter college and students who plan to enter the workforce.^{xvii} Graduation rates varied among race and ethnicity. Asian students have the highest graduation rates across all public high schools while black

| Students Taking Early College Courses by School (2019) | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|----------|---------|
| | Total Students | | Grade 9 | | Grade 10 | | Grade 11 | | Grade 12 | |
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Auburn High School | 630 | 35% | 123 | 18% | 118 | 26% | 199 | 57% | 190 | 58% |
| Guilford High School | 469 | 26% | 58 | 10% | 97 | 20% | 190 | 43% | 124 | 4% |
| Jefferson High School | 342 | 20% | 68 | 10% | 38 | 9% | 129 | 41% | 107 | 41% |
| Rockford East High School | 384 | 21% | 87 | 15% | 62 | 13% | 118 | 31% | 117 | 32% |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Rockford School District 205 | 1,818 | 24% | 336 | 12% | 312 | 16% | 633 | 37% | 538 | 38% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

or African American students have lower graduation rates among all ethnicities.

In 2019, Rockford Public Schools had 51 percent of students enrolled in college within twelve months of graduating high school. That number increased very slightly at sixteen months to 52 percent. Auburn High School, Rockford East High School, and Guilford High School had over half their graduating students enrolled in college.

| Graduation Rates by School (2019) | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Graduation Rate |
| Auburn High School | 63% |
| Guilford High School | 71% |
| Jefferson High School | 66% |
| Rockford East High School | 66% |
| | |
| Rockford School District 205 | 66% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

In Rockford, more post-secondary students are enrolled in community colleges than at universities. Rock Valley College, the community college serving the City of Rockford, has accessible locations throughout the region, and is more affordable than most traditional or larger colleges in the region. In 2019, it was estimated that within 12 months following graduation, RPS had 33 percent of graduates enrolling in a community college and 18 percent enrolling in universities. Of the four public high schools, Auburn High School has the most graduates enrolling in post-secondary educational programs with 55 percent, of which 29 percent are enrolled in a community college and 26 percent are enrolled in a university. Rockford East and Guilford High Schools followed Auburn High School's post-secondary enrollment rates at 52 percent and 50 percent, respectively. Jefferson High School had the lowest post-secondary enrollment rate at 46 percent.

Post-Secondary Educational Institutions

Access to post-secondary educational opportunities is key to a city's workforce. Whether it's an associate degree, bachelor's degree, trades or apprenticeship certification, a post-secondary education provides residents the necessary skills and training needed to pursue higher paying careers. Not only are there individual benefits for students who attend post-secondary school, but there are also benefits to the public and community in general. Post-secondary education can improve quality of life, lead to better health outcomes, increase civic engagement and results in higher tax revenues, which in turn are reinvested back into the community.^{xviii}

Looking at educational attainment, 84 percent of Rockford's population has at least graduated high school or an equivalent education such as a GED. Of this 84 percent, 31 percent of the population has obtained only a high school diploma, 23 percent have attended some college but do not have a degree, 8 percent have an associate degree, 22 percent have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, 14 percent have received a bachelor's degree, and 9 percent have earned a graduate degree or

| Students Enrolling in College by Type (2019) | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|
| | Within 12 Months | | | Within 16 Months | | |
| | Community College | Universities | Trade/Vocational | Community College | Universities | Trade/Vocational |
| Auburn High School | 29% | 26% | 0% | 29% | 27% | 0% |
| Guilford High School | 33% | 17% | 0% | 35% | 17% | 0% |
| Jefferson High School | 30% | 16% | 0% | 31% | 16% | 0% |
| Rockford East High School | 40% | 12% | 0% | 42% | 12% | 0% |
| | | | | | | |
| Rockford School District 205 | 33% | 18% | 0% | 34% | 18% | 0% |

Source: Illinois Report Card Data

higher. Many Rockford residents have chosen to get their degree from several opportunities for post-secondary education within the city offering associate degrees, bachelor degrees, and a career college.

The City of Rockford is served by seven post-secondary educational institutions within the city limits and nineteen institutions within approximately 65 miles of downtown Rockford. A brief summary of the post-secondary institutions within the city is provided below.

Rock Valley College

Rock Valley College (RVC) is a public community college offering over 30 accredited two-year degree programs with discounted tuition fees for residents of Winnebago and Boone Counties. In the 2017-2018 academic year, approximately 6,000 students per semester were enrolled in RVC. The average RVC student age was 24 but the college

serves a wide range of residents. The per credit hour tuition rate is \$115 or approximately \$3,765 per year. Sixty percent of students enrolled at RVC receive some sort of financial aid.^{xix} RVC attracts and locally retains workforce talent through their affordable, post-secondary educational opportunities.^{xx}

Rock Valley College's department of Engineering and Technology offers many degree and certificate programs including Electronic Engineering Technology, Manufacturing Engineering Technology, Mechatronics, and Sustainable Energy Systems. Additionally, RVC and Northern Illinois University (NIU) have partnered to allow students to earn a NIU degree in Mechanical Engineering at RVC.

The RVC Advanced Technology Center (ATC) is the institution's new state-of-the-art, 77,000 square-foot fa-

cility located in Belvidere. The ATC will house many of RVC's manufacturing, technology, and industrial-based programs that provide hands-on learning preparing students and currently-employed workers for high-demand jobs with local manufacturers. The programs offered in its opening semester included: CNC Machining, Industrial Maintenance, Mechatronics, Truck Driver Training, and Welding.

RVC is also known regionally for its Nursing program, where students can earn an Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) Degree and be eligible to sit for the NCLEX-RN exam to earn Registered Nurse (RN) credentials. Graduates of the program are often employed at one of the three local hospital systems, as well as other private healthcare entities. Once hired, these RNs are then expected to complete a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN). To help facilitate an easy transition into a RN-BSN Completion Program, RVC Nursing has developed partnerships with five RN-BSN completion programs.

Rockford University

Rockford University is a private four-year institution offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. This university attracts a variety of talent to the area, including international students as well as transfer students. In fall of 2020, Rockford University had a total of 924 full-time undergraduate students and saw an increase in the number of students enrolled in their Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and Master of Education (M.Ed) programs compared to 2019. Undergraduate tuition is \$465 per credit hour, while graduate-level tuition is \$750 per credit hour for Masters of Business Administration, and \$650 per credit hour for MAT and M.Ed.

Rasmussen University Rockford

Rasmussen University is a private institution with four locations in Illinois, including one in Rockford. The various Illinois locations help strengthen connections and opportunities between Rockford and the Chicagoland area. This institution offers a variety of degrees ranging from associate degrees to master's degrees across seven schools of study (Justice, Nursing, Education, Business, Design, Health Sciences, and Technology). Rasmussen strengthens the local workforce by offering flexible and affordable degree programs as low as \$10,000.^{xxi}

Rockford Career College

This accredited institution offers both diploma and associate degree programs in areas such as animal sciences, business, medical, legal, and skilled trades. In addition to these programs, the college also works with employers to

connect students to employment and internship opportunities. This is another educational institution that helps prepare community members in the region for the workforce at an affordable price point, while also attracting other talent in surrounding areas.^{xxii}

University of Illinois – School of Medicine

The University of Illinois College of Medicine Rockford is a 20-acre campus located in Rockford, IL. The university provides community-based medical training to medical students, residents, and fellows. The College of Medicine is internationally recognized as a leader in rural medical education. The university's programs include Doctor of Medicine, Rural Medical Education (RMED), and Master of Science Degree in Medical Biotechnology (MBT), Family Medicine Residency, and several others. In recent years, the university has expanded its campus across the street and built additional educational facilities. In August of 2021, UIC Medicine Rockford announced plans to expand its facilities yet again with a \$100 million construction project. The new educational facility will focus on areas such as dentistry, public health, social work, and applied health. The proposed expansion could reportedly double the number of enrollees in these programs.^{xxiii}

Saint Anthony College of Nursing

Owned and operated by OSF HealthCare, Saint Anthony College of Nursing is a private college accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Saint Anthony College of Nursing offers a Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) and Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) degree programs with a fall 2020 enrollment of 210 undergraduates. The estimated tuition and fees per year is \$27,611.

Northern Illinois University

Northern Illinois University (NIU) is a public university based in DeKalb, IL, but has several charter campuses located in Chicago, Naperville, and Rockford. Total enrollment for all of the NIU system was 16,234 in fall of 2021 with 11,834 undergraduate and 4,079 graduate students. Programs offered at the NIU Rockford campus for undergraduate degrees include the College of Visual and Performing Arts as well as several graduate-level courses, including a Master of Arts in Teaching – Elementary Education, Master of Public Administration, Master of Science in Education – Education Administration, Master of Science in Education – Literacy Education (ESL/Bilingual Education), Master of Science in Education – Literacy Education (Reading), Educational Specialist (Ed.S) – Educational Administration, and Doctor of Education – Educational Administration.

Education & Local Workforce Connection

Higher education and workforce development programs work in tandem to strengthen the local economy and support a higher quality of life for residents. These programs both address the needs of the employers and community members by empowering and preparing residents to enter or re-enter the local workforce. Post-secondary educational opportunities can help attract new employers and talent, as well as bring communities together through education, social, and cultural events. Numerous partnerships exist within the city that help facilitate the connection between education and workforce.

One of the most notable organizations in Rockford working to make these connections is The Workforce Connection. This organization is led by a board of local business leaders; it was established by the Governor of Illinois as a result of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Workforce Connection serves as a regional workforce development resource for Boone, Stephenson, and Winnebago Counties. They also focus on addressing gaps in access to needed employment resources in the Northern Illinois Region through skill building programs and employment connections. As a result, more community members are able to develop their skills and confidently seek employment opportunities, ultimately creating a stronger local workforce.^{xxiv}

The Workforce Connection Center, located at 303 North Main Street, Rockford, IL 61101, helps community members explore post-secondary educational and career opportunities by providing computer access, resume and job application assistance, career guidance, assistance for veterans and people with disabilities, refugee and immigrant services, workshops, and basic skills classes.^{xxv} This center also helps employers with talent acquisition, providing assessments, specific training needs, and workplace programming.^{xxvi} There are also a number of private staffing agencies in Rockford that connect job seekers to employers.

Workforce development programs are comprehensive in nature and can address the wide range of needs of both job seekers and employers, strengthen the local economy, spur business competitiveness, and create a bridge between education and the workforce.^{xxvii} Post-secondary institutions also offer many benefits, including community engagement (with broad community learning opportunities), attracting new industries, employers and employees, and fostering a strong economy.



East High School Graduation - 2021

Goals Objectives and Implementation Strategies

EDUCATION

Work to increase educational attainment rate

| Implementation Strategy | Cost | Timeframe | Priority |
|---|--------|-----------|----------|
| Align and support programs designed to improve the quality and availability of early childhood learning and family support services | \$\$ | Short | High |
| Promote Rock Valley College aviation and maintenance technology certification program | \$ | Short | Medium |
| Market support services to increase GED class enrollment and completion | \$ | Long | Medium |
| Provide support for implementing Rockford Promise and work to expand the program with increased funding | \$\$\$ | Short | High |
| Introduce more vocational and technology classes with more exposure opportunities in middle and high school to better align with opportunities after graduation | \$\$ | Short | High |

Align and support regional efforts for retaining Rockford residents, and attracting new students to enroll in certificate courses, associates degrees, college, and graduate student programs in order to find local jobs when they graduate from higher learning institutions

| Implementation Strategy | Cost | Timeframe | Priority |
|---|--------|-----------|----------|
| Develop and implement ACT Work Keys, manufacturing skills standards, and certification credentials for students | \$ | Medium | Medium |
| Identify local businesses that are in need of skilled workers and align them with local educational institutions to train and employ locally | \$ | Short | High |
| Before graduating 12th grade, educate students on readiness for work skills, soft skills, and life skills needed to succeed in any work environment | \$\$ | Short | Medium |
| Continue, and increase, informing high school students of local trades programs and apprenticeship opportunities that align with local skilled positions that are ready to hire | \$ | Short | Medium |
| Continue to support Rockford Comprehensive Community Solutions (CCS) programming including YouthBuild, RockForWork, and ALPHA | \$\$\$ | Short | High |

Expand post-high school learning programming and facilities

| Implementation Strategy | Cost | Timeframe | Priority |
|---|------|-----------|----------|
| Identify opportunities to physically connect college and university campuses to the community | \$ | Long | Medium |
| Research and identify ways to create more support and options to inform local high school students, and those interested in obtaining their GED, of the opportunities to attend college or trade school in Rockford | \$ | Medium | Medium |
| Increase funding to support individuals who wish to get their GED, and then align opportunities to attend a local college or trades program | \$\$ | Medium | High |

Chapter Endnotes

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