

Aligning a Vital Educational Partnership

SITUATION ANALYSIS

The greatest challenges facing Rockford are related to **public education** and its near- and long-term impact on our community. Our current social and economic vitality depends upon **accelerated achievement** in public education. Enhanced educational attainment is the foundation of our future and central to growth in the Rockford region.

The Rockford region, eighty miles northwest of Chicago, has a population of 350,000. The City of Rockford, population 150,000, is the largest community in the region where the cost of living index is 85% of the national average and crime rates and unemployment are high.

Community Costs

Rockford's high school **chronic truancy rates** range from 12% to 20% and a "culture of truancy" permeates even lower grade levels. The RPS 205 truancy rate of 6.8% is almost double the state average of 3.7%. Truancy is highly correlated with dropping out, which, according to a September, 2009 Gallup poll, almost 9 in 10 Americans believe is either the most, or one of the most important challenges facing high schools today.

The 2007 study "How Truancy is Cheating Our Future" (United Way/NIU) estimates truancy's annual cost to Winnebago County ranges from \$25 to \$38 million. From this report: "Chronic truancy is widely cited as one of the most powerful predictors of subsequent juvenile delinquency. One study, for example, estimates that chronically truant students are twelve times more likely to be charged with serious assaults..."

Rockford **students are comparatively unprepared** to thrive in post-secondary education or 21st Century employment settings. RPS 205's SY '08-'09 composite ACT score of 18.4 is more than two points below the state average of 20.6.

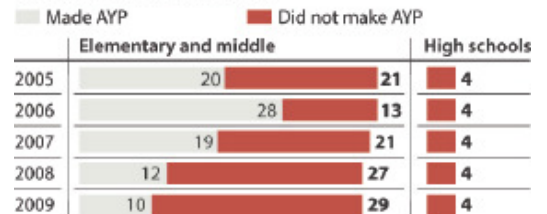
The percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards ranges by high school from 23.7% to 38.9%, and only 70.9% of Rockford's high school seniors graduate versus the state average of 87.1%. The graduation rate for black and Hispanic students is even lower at only 66%, reflecting a **significant racial achievement gap**.

Similarly, the PSAE, administered in 11th grade, shows wide gaps between the percentages of white, Hispanic and black students who "meet" or "exceed" state standards. (For reading: white students 58.3%, Hispanic 30.4 and black students 24.1. In mathematics: white students 42.2, Hispanic 27.2 and black students 11.5.)

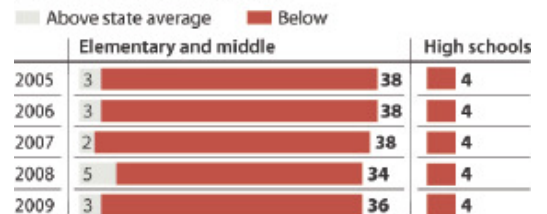
Under these adverse circumstances businesses struggle to recruit, hire and retain talented employees, and many families have migrated to higher-achieving school districts or enrolled their students in private schools.

Though daunting, **these challenges must be overcome** for the Rockford region to begin to recover and thrive.

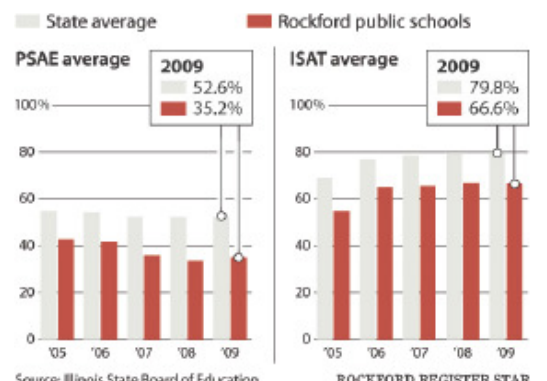
ADEQUATE YEARLY PROGRESS



ABOVE AVERAGE TEST SCORES



HIGH SCHOOL TEST SCORES



No Sector is an Island

Rapid student progress will require a concerted effort by a committed **cross-section of entities** in Rockford: education, government, commerce, faith, social services, civic organizations and community non-profits.

And, as with many worthy endeavors currently focused on change, the prospects for improving public education cannot depend on adding vast new resources, but rather on selectively focusing and then aligning community resources on specific strategic goals.

A public-private partnership could serve as the point of coordination between community resources and educational needs.

The advent of a new RPS administration and recent discussions about education make this an opportune time to press for **unified engagement** between the public and private sectors to improve public education.

In fact, while the recent uptick in student enrollment for the '09-'10 school year undoubtedly reflects the current economic environment, it may also signal that the community is expecting substantive educational improvement.

The new district superintendent, Dr. LaVonne Sheffield, has outlined **five goals** for her administration, and the fulfillment of these imperatives requires broad support among Rockford residents.

1. Enhance learning opportunities for all children
2. Ensure parents are partners in the education process
3. Provide clean, safe schools
4. Hold adults accountable
5. Run an efficient business operation

However, the Rockford community has a limited understanding of RPS' goals, priorities and work plans. Increased impact on student achievement could be **compounded** if focused efforts and a broader support system are effectively directed toward specific strategic goals.

Essential Partnership

There is presently no functioning, broad-based organization to act as evangelist, coordinator and facilitator for current and future investments of community support into Rockford Public Schools District 205. This plan establishes **Alignment Rockford** to fill that void.

A strong working relationship with RPS executive leadership and their endorsement of this new entity as the organization to build community engagement are essential for success. Best practices from education and other sectors must guide a system adapted to our community's needs and goals.

In 2009 a diverse group of Rockford's civic, business, religious and educational leaders evaluated how other communities across the country have responded to similar trends with the objective of adapting best principles and practices in Rockford to advance academic aspiration and achievement.

The innovative system in Nashville, Tennessee, **Alignment Nashville**, attracted this group's attention for effectively coordinating community resources behind their school district's strategic plan for student success.

As the Nashville model demonstrates, the turnaround of public schools cannot be accomplished by the school district alone. Indeed, this critical endeavor can only be achieved by a **broad and far-reaching collaboration** of educational, political, corporate, religious, civic, social and grassroots entities faithfully working together to advance educational achievement and further educational attainment. For this reason a collaborative framework known as **Alignment Rockford** is forming to improve public education.

"The problems facing our cities seem to defy solution. But the only certainty is that the increasingly complex challenges exceed the capabilities of any single sector—public, private, or non-profit—to solve them alone."

*James E. Austin
Drucker Leadership Series*

"Each institution has to do its own work, the way each instrument in an orchestra plays its own part. But there is also the score, the community. And only if each individual instrument contributes to the score is there music. Otherwise there is only noise. And this is about the score."

Peter F. Drucker

For education to contribute to Rockford becoming a **strong global competitor**, it must be driven by a clear vision and stalwart commitment to create **intellectual capital** that generates social and economic development.

VISION

Alignment Rockford envisions all students graduating from high school with marketable employment skills or enrolling in post-secondary education. They are eager to live, work, learn, create, and play in the Rockford Region as contributing adults.

MISSION

Alignment Rockford's mission is to align community resources in support of public school strategies to raise student achievement, improve the health and happiness of our children, and advance the economic and social well-being of our community.

WORKING COMMITTEES

Working committees will be organized around strategic needs as determined by District 205 leadership and the AR board. Their work will be focused on opportunities identified in the RPS 205 strategic plan, and their primary task is to **marshal resources to achieve measurable results**.

Working committees will be chaired by an RPS 205 executive, co-chaired by a community member, accountable to the AR board, and administratively supported by the AR staff. Committee members will be drawn from within the business, non-profit, education, City/County government, healthcare, faith, and civic service sectors to **ensure diversity** of perspectives and skills.

OUTCOMES

Goals will be established in each working committee, and outcomes will be monitored and assessed by Alignment Rockford's board. An **annual report** will be published and distributed to evaluate achievements and make recommendations.

LEADERSHIP VALUES

As a wide range of organizations collaborate on this challenging community initiative, the following leadership values must form the **foundation of operational relationships** between Alignment Rockford and those involved in its mission:

1. We work with a spirit of unity – We agree to offer one voice on topics related to the alignment effort and to resolve conflicting agendas in private.
2. Our relationships are based on trust – We understand that predictability, clear communication, and mutual support precede success in every challenging community endeavor.
3. Our focus is on our children's needs – We seek collaborative, student-focused solutions to barriers which impair academic achievement.
4. We promote life-long learning – We know that raising educational aspirations and attainment will result in greater economic prosperity for all in our community.

FUNDING

Funding will come from private sources during the start-up phase.

STRATEGIES

1. Engage the partners

- a. Establish healthy working relationships with vested partners
 - i. Rockford Public Schools District 205 and School Board
 - ii. Rockford business community and affiliated organizations
 - iii. Government, Non-Profits, Civic and Social Services organizations
- b. Support District 205 strategic planning and identification of needs and opportunities
- c. Form Working Committee structure to
 - i. Support District 205 plans and programs
 1. Employ value stream mapping to eliminate waste, add educational value
 2. Offer input on District 205 strategies to refine and enhance performance
 - a. Business sector report cards
 - b. Parent/Student/Community sector report cards
 - ii. Develop and implement specific work plans to accomplish measurable goals

2. Build the network

- a. Identify organizations and individuals with a vested interest in public education
- b. Build consensus on purposes and benefits of new strategies and alignment:
 - i. Greater returns on investment—by working together toward common goals, resources are leveraged, duplication is avoided, and efficiency is greatly increased
 - ii. Higher quality services—utilizing expertise from multiple organizations guarantees a broader perspective and a wiser approach
 - iii. Enhanced capacity—very few organizations have the capacity for community-wide impact. A collective effort enhances the impact of each organization, while generating a much greater overall impact
 - iv. Leveraging local funding—similar programs in other communities have demonstrated they can attract national grants if local funding has begun building the pilot programs
- c. Attract and engage organizations and individuals not currently involved in public education improvement efforts
- d. Build capacity among network participants

3. Manage communications

- a. Disseminate information about purpose of the new organization
- b. Build public awareness about the need for strategically-focused public support
- c. Recruit volunteers for tactical implementation
- d. Advocate for public school needs
- e. Coordinate the preparation and distribution of an annual report

4. Support and report

- a. Assist with grant, development and funding activities
- b. Coordinate professional development for teachers, administrators and board members
- c. Track, evaluate and publish the results of working committees
- d. Facilitate communication between the board and working committees
- e. Provide administrative support for working committees