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CHAPIN HALL

Profiling Illinois Districts: Clarifying pathways for school-based and cross-sector action

Chapin Hall Research Brief

Grouping districts by shared characteristics can help state and district leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders see where differentiated supports are needed. In a companion brief, Chapin Hall developed a typology of Illinois districts based on patterns of community adversity, academic performance, geographic context, and district finances. This brief builds on that work by developing descriptive profiles from Illinois Report Card data, showing what students and educators encounter inside each district type.

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Introduction

Illinois state leaders increasingly rely on composite measures to better understand differences across school districts and to guide resource planning. One such measure, the Children's Adversity Index, captures community conditions within district boundaries. In the companion brief, *Developing an Evidence-Informed Typology of Illinois School Districts to Support Differentiated Planning*, we introduced a typology that groups Illinois districts based on patterns across four domains: community adversity, academic performance, geographic context, and district finances. Drawing on the Children's Adversity Index alongside the Illinois Report Card and USDA rural-urban continuum codes, the typology captures the broader structural conditions shaping educational opportunity across the state. It identifies groups of districts facing similar combinations of conditions and capacity.

This second research brief builds on that typology by creating descriptive profiles of each district type. While the typology identifies structural patterns, additional indicators show how those conditions surface inside the classroom door and at the intersection of schools and communities.

Together, the two briefs move from identifying district types to examining what students and educators experience within them. The profiles then point toward what those patterns suggest for planning and action.

Enhancing Planning with Descriptive District Profiles

Educational outcomes are shaped by conditions both inside and outside the classroom door. Some factors, such as instructional practices or disciplinary policies, are primarily shaped by decisions made within school systems. Others, such as housing stability, early learning experiences, and community economic conditions, originate outside schools but powerfully shape what happens inside them.

The typology laid out in the previous brief describes the landscape districts operate within; the descriptive indicators presented here help show what students and educators encounter once they step through the classroom door. Together, these perspectives help clarify where school-based strategies may be most effective, and where cross-sector supports may be needed. This distinction matters for planning, as different district types may benefit from meaningfully different approaches to supporting students.

District Typologies

The companion brief, *Developing an Evidence-Informed Typology of Illinois School Districts to Support Differentiated Planning*, established the following four types of districts in Illinois:

Table 1. School District Typologies and Descriptions

TYPE 1

37%

Higher-Performing Moderate-Resource Districts

Type 1: Higher-Performing Districts with Moderate Resources

Primarily metro districts with strong academic performance, moderate per-pupil spending and property tax capacity (reflecting moderate local affluence and fiscal autonomy), and relatively low (though not uniformly low) economic barriers, risk, and unmet need.

TYPE 2

16%

High-Need Urban Districts

Type 2: High-Need, High-Spending Urban Districts

Metro districts with the lowest performance, high per-pupil spending, constrained local tax base (reflecting elevated state and federal funding), and very high economic barriers (indicating low local affluence), though levels of unmet community need are not elevated to the same extent.

TYPE 3

32%

High-Need Rural Districts

Type 3: Rural Districts Facing Elevated Risk and Resource Constraints

Predominantly rural districts with lower performance, low spending and limited local fiscal capacity, and high levels of community risk and unmet need, alongside moderate economic disadvantage.

TYPE 4

15%

Resource-Rich Metro Districts

Type 4: Resource-Rich, High-Performing Metro Districts

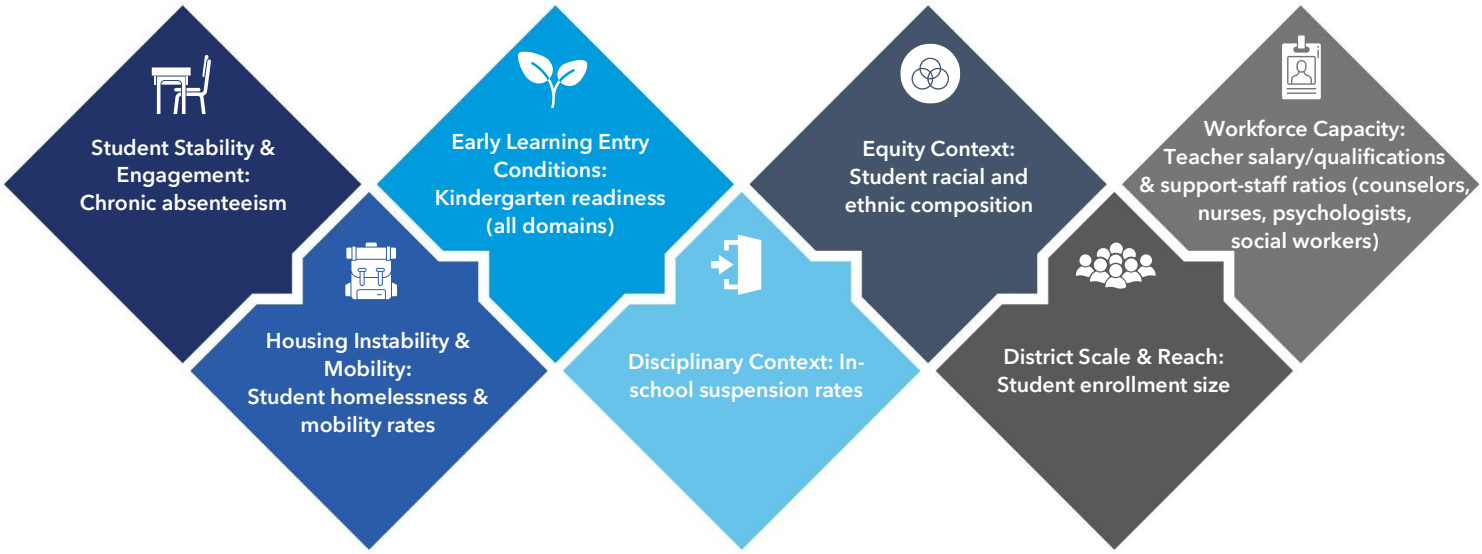
Metro districts with the highest performance, high per-pupil spending and strong property tax capacity (reflecting high community affluence and local fiscal autonomy), and very low levels of community risk and unmet need, along with generally low economic barriers.

Additional Descriptive Domains for District Profiles

To further characterize the district types identified in the typology, this brief introduces a set of descriptive indicators drawn from the Illinois Report Card and organized into seven domains: student stability and engagement; housing instability and mobility; early learning entry conditions; disciplinary context; equity context; district scale and reach; and workforce capacity. These indicators help illustrate how broader structural conditions, such as community adversity, geographic context, and district resources take shape within schools.

The indicators were selected through an iterative process combining the research team's expertise with a review of relevant literature. Selection was guided by four criteria: theoretical relevance, contribution of new information (beyond the typology), interpretive value, and relevance for planning and action. Additional detail on the conceptual domains, indicators, and supporting research is provided in Appendix A.

The indicators used to develop district profiles include:



All indicators are drawn from the 2024 Illinois Report Card, ensuring that the measures are publicly available and consistently reported across districts. Using a common statewide data source allows for reliable comparison across district types while remaining accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and community stakeholders.

These indicators are used in the sections that follow to develop descriptive profiles of district types and clarify how patterns of need and capacity differ across districts.

Current Study: Profiling District Types to Clarify Pathways for Action

This study builds on the district typology introduced in the companion brief by examining how additional district- and school-level indicators help further characterize each district type.

Specifically, this study asks: How do descriptive indicators help clarify differences across district types, and what do those differences suggest for planning and action? By pairing district type classifications with indicators drawn from the Illinois Report Card, the analysis develops profiles that highlight patterns in student stability, early learning conditions, housing instability, staffing capacity, and other key factors.

Grouping districts by shared structural conditions offers a different basis for understanding what districts need than administrative categories such as region or district size.

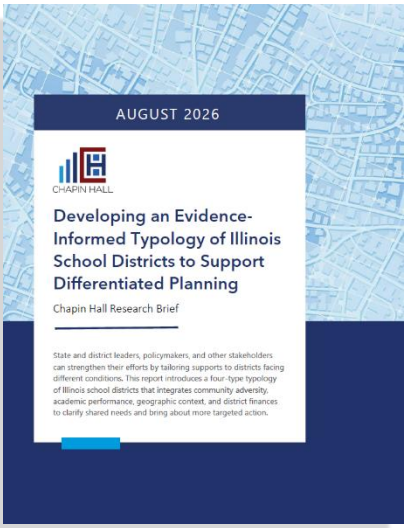
These profiles provide additional context for interpreting district types and help identify where school-based strategies, cross-sector supports, or upstream interventions may be most relevant. The following section describes the data sources and analytic approach used to develop these profiles.

Method

This analysis links each district's type classification to district- and school-level indicators from the 2024 Illinois Report Card and summarizes those indicators within types.

Data Sources

This analysis builds on the district typology developed in the companion brief, *Developing an Evidence-Informed Typology of Illinois School Districts to Support Differentiated Planning,* which grouped districts based on patterns of community adversity, academic performance, geographic context, and district finances. For the present study, district type classifications were linked to additional district- and school-level indicators from the 2024 Illinois Report Card, published annually by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE; Illinois State Board of Education, n.d.).



Study Sample

The analysis includes 834 public school districts from the analytic sample used in the companion brief.

Indicators

Indicators are drawn from the seven domains introduced above; see Appendix A and Table A-1 for selection criteria and definitions.[1]

Analytic Approach

To describe how district types differ across indicators, we calculated average values for each indicator within each district type. These averages summarize typical conditions across districts grouped within the same type.

To better understand variation within types, we also examined median, minimum, and maximum values for each indicator. Together, these descriptive statistics provide context for interpreting how structural conditions identified in the typology appear in the experiences of students and schools.

[1] Data quality thresholds were applied to ensure reliable comparisons across districts. Indicators with ≥90% coverage were included in profile tables; those with 70%–89% coverage were included with appropriate caveats; and those with <70% coverage were described narratively but excluded from formal comparisons.

District Type Profiles

Examining descriptive indicators across district types reveals distinct patterns in student stability, housing disruption, early learning readiness, disciplinary context, and district scale. Together, these patterns help explain the typology introduced in the companion brief.

Note: See Appendix Tables A-1 through A-4 in *Developing an Evidence-Informed Typology of Illinois School Districts* for a list of school districts by type.

Some indicators differ sharply across all four types while others separate metro from rural districts. This suggests planning that targets type-specific conditions while also differentiating between rural and metro contexts.

Patterns Across District Types

Figure 1 summarizes how 15 indicators across seven domains vary across the four district types. Each row allows for a direct comparison across types on a single indicator, while the full table reveals how types differ across combinations of conditions. Some indicators, such as chronic absenteeism, student mobility, and kindergarten readiness, show clear gradients across types, while others reflect more distinct contrasts, particularly between urban and rural contexts. The sections that follow develop fuller profiles for each district type, drawing on these indicators to highlight the combinations of strengths, conditions, and constraints that are most consequential for planning and action.

Figure 1. Descriptive Indicators by District Type

	Type 1 (CLASS SHARE=37%)	Type 2 (CLASS SHARE=16%)	Type 3 (CLASS SHARE=32%)	Type 4 (CLASS SHARE=15%)
STUDENT STABILITY & ENGAGEMENT				
Chronic absenteeism	10.4%	17.3%	14.9%	10.2%
DISCIPLINARY CONTEXT				
Percent Civil Rights Data Collection In School Suspensions	3.2%	7.6%	5.1%	2.7%
DISTRICT SCALE & REACH				
Student enrollment size (number)	1,537 mean; 827 median*	5,402 mean; 1,704 median*	803 mean; 528 median*	3,180 mean; 2,049 median*
HOUSING INSTABILITY				
Student mobility rate	6.2%	11.6%	9.9%	5.1%
Student homelessness rate***	1.6%	2.9%	5.6%	1.1%
EARLY LEARNING ENTRY CONDITIONS				
Kindergarten readiness (all domains)****	44.8%	26.3%	43.5%	37.6%
EQUITY CONTEXT				
Student enrollment: White	78.2%	27.4%	82.4%	61.1%
Student enrollment: Black	4.5%	30.0%	5.4%	5.0%
Student enrollment: Hispanic	10.1%	36.1%	7.5%	21.6%
TEACHER STABILITY & WORKFORCE CONDITIONS				
Average teacher salary	$64,941.55	$69,699.31	$55,087.00	$77,473.90
Percent novice teachers**	6.82%	8.14%	9.41%	5.64%
School counselor to student ratio	1:553; 36.2% have no counselor	1:433; 35.8% have no counselor	1:493; 30.1% have no counselor	1:553; 37.8% have no counselor
School nurse to student ratio	1:1,537; 55.4% have no nurse	1:1,653; 40.3% have no nurse	1:1,438; 64.3% have no nurse	1:1,650; 32.3% have no nurse
School psychologist to student ratio	1:870; 44% have no psychologist	1:1,165; 35.1% have no psychologist	1:1,657; 50.4% have no psychologist	1:673; 15% have no psychologist
School social worker to student ratio	1:416; 19.5% have no social worker	1:581; 5.2% have no social worker	1:590; 28.2% have no social worker	1:321; 3.9% have no social worker

* Rounded to the nearest whole number. ** The percentage of FTE teachers with less than two FTE years of combined Illinois public school service (ISBE, 2024). *** Homelessness rates should be interpreted with caution due to suppression and missing underlying counts for 42.9% of districts. **** Reported means are upper bounds; ISBE suppression removes low-readiness districts with small kindergarten cohorts.

Student enrollment varies considerably within and across district types, a pattern that is important for interpreting the mean values reported in Figure 1. When a small number of very large districts are grouped within the same type, they can skew the mean upward in ways that do not reflect the typical district's experience.

This pattern is most pronounced for High-Need Urban Districts, where the mean enrollment of 5,402 is more than three times the median of 1,704. This gap reflects the presence of a few exceptionally large urban systems, most notably Chicago Public Schools.

Because many of the indicators in Figure 1 are also reported as means, readers should keep this skew in mind when interpreting values for Type 2 districts in particular. The median enrollment figures reported alongside means in Figure 1 are intended to support this interpretation by providing a clearer picture of the typical district within each type.

Type 1: Higher-Performing Moderate-Resource Districts

The profile in Table 2 summarizes key indicators and highlights patterns that inform potential pathways for planning and action.

Table 2. Type 1 Higher-Performing Moderate-Resource Districts Profile Snapshot

Domain	Indicator	Value	What it signals
Student Stability & Engagement	Chronic Absenteeism	10.41%	Low disengagement
Early Learning	Kindergarten Readiness (all domains)	44.77%	Comparable to High-Need Rural districts; above High-Need Urban districts
Workforce Capacity	School psychologist to student ratio	1:870; 44% with none	Limited mental health support capacity compared to Resource-Rich Metro districts
	School counselor to student ratio	1:553; 36.2% have no counselor	
Housing Instability	Mobility	6.17%	Some housing disruption, below higher-need types

Narrative Profile

The descriptive profile for Higher-Performing Moderate-Resource Districts reflects a broadly stable operating context, but one where that stability is uneven and not guaranteed. Absenteeism and mobility are lower than in higher-need district types, and kindergarten readiness is among the highest across types (44.77%), indicating that many students enter school with foundational supports in place.

This stability exists despite more limited institutional capacity than higher-resource types. Access to counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers is more limited than in Resource-Rich Metro districts across all four roles rather than concentrated in any one.

These districts tend to serve moderately sized, predominantly white student populations with community-level economic barriers less concentrated than in higher-need types, though disparities remain within and across schools.

Overall, this profile reflects districts that are largely on track but operating with limited margins, where sustaining performance and addressing emerging needs may require strategic investments rather than large-scale intervention.

What This Suggests for Planning

School-Based Strategies (Inside the Classroom Door)

- Strengthen student support staffing to prevent emerging academic and nonacademic needs before they become persistent gaps.
- Use early warning systems - such as attendance and course-performance monitoring, behavioral-risk indicators, social-emotional or mental health screeners, and student-support referral tracking, to identify and respond to early signs of student disengagement.
- Invest in teacher compensation and professional supports to strengthen retention.

Cross-Sector Strategies (Outside the Classroom Door)

- Leverage community partnerships to expand access to student supports, without increasing permanent staffing.
- Sustain and strengthen connections to early childhood systems to maintain kindergarten readiness gains.
- Coordinate with regional partners to monitor and respond to emerging economic and housing pressures.

Type 2: High-Need, High-Spending Urban Districts

This profile highlights how high levels of need intersect with large-scale district systems, shaping both the intensity of student needs and the capacity required to respond (see Table 3).

Table 3. Type 2: High-Need, High-Spending Urban Districts Profile Snapshot

Domain	Indicator	Value	What it signals
Student Stability & Engagement	Chronic absenteeism	17.26%	Highest disengagement across district types
Housing Instability	Student mobility	11.55%	Highest instability across district types
Housing Instability	Student homelessness rate	2.94%*	Elevated housing disruption
Early Learning Entry Conditions	Kindergarten readiness	26.29%	Lowest early learning readiness across district types
Disciplinary Context	In-school suspension rate	7.58%	Highest disciplinary removal rate across district types
Equity Context	Student racial/ethnic composition	29.95% Black; 36.06% Hispanic	Majority students of color; culturally responsive approaches indicated
District Scale & Reach	Student enrollment size	5,402 mean; 1,704 median	Largest across district types; scale amplifies complexity of service coordination

* Homelessness rate should be interpreted with caution due to suppression and missing underlying counts

Narrative Profile

The descriptive profile for High-Need Urban Districts reflects the most acute convergence of structural adversity and institutional complexity across types. Chronic absenteeism (17.26%) and student mobility (11.55%) are elevated, indicating that many students experience persistent instability that disrupts engagement and continuity in schooling. The student homelessness rate (2.94%) points in the same direction, though this figure should be interpreted with caution due to suppression and missing data. Kindergarten readiness is the lowest across all four district types (26.29%), indicating lower measured readiness at school entry.

At the same time, these districts are not resource poor. They serve large and diverse student populations, averaging 5,402 students, with a median of 1,704, reflecting the outsized skew of large urban districts like Chicago Public Schools on the mean. These districts serve student populations that are majority Black (29.95%) and Hispanic (36.06%), communities that have historically faced the greatest barriers to educational opportunity. This profile reflects districts where high-intensity, coordinated, and culturally responsive strategies are most strongly indicated given the scale and concentration of need. In-school suspension rates (7.58%) are the highest across all district types, suggesting that approaches to discipline that reduce exclusionary practices and keep students in the classroom may be particularly relevant and positively impactful in these districts.

What This Suggests for Planning

School-Based Strategies (Inside the Classroom Door)

- Strengthen multi-tiered systems of support to ensure consistent access to academic and behavioral interventions across schools.
- Implement culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices to address the effects of housing instability and community stress on student learning and behavior.
- Prioritize early literacy and foundational skill development to address low kindergarten readiness and prevent widening gaps in early grades.

Cross-Sector Strategies (Outside the Classroom Door)

- Expand community-based partnerships to coordinate wraparound supports within schools, including mental health, housing, and family services.
- Strengthen coordination with housing and homelessness systems to reduce student mobility and stabilize enrollment.
- Partner with early childhood systems to expand access to high-quality pre-K and strengthen transitions into kindergarten.

Type 3: Rural Districts Facing Elevated Risk and Resource Constraints

This profile reflects how high levels of need interact with limited local capacity, shaping both student experiences and the availability of supports (see Table 4).

Table 4. Type 3: Rural Districts Facing Elevated Risk and Resource Constraints Profile Snapshot

Domain	Indicator	Value	What it signals
Student Stability & Engagement	Chronic absenteeism	14.86%	Elevated disengagement compared to other district types
Housing Instability	Student mobility	9.90%	Ongoing instability
Housing Instability	Student homelessness rate	5.60%*	Elevated compared to other district types
Early Learning Entry Conditions	Kindergarten readiness	43.51%	Moderate early learning conditions
District Scale & Reach	Student enrollment size	803 (mean), 528 median*	Smallest across district types; limits economies of scale and constrains service delivery
Workforce Capacity	Percent novice teachers	9.41%	Highest share of early-career teachers across district types, signaling workforce pipeline constraints
Workforce Capacity	Teacher average salary	$55,087	Lowest teacher salaries across all district types, compounding workforce pipeline constraints

* Homelessness rate should be interpreted with caution due to suppression and missing underlying counts

Narrative Profile

The descriptive profile for High-Need Rural Districts reflects a compounding pattern of elevated need paired with limited institutional capacity. Chronic absenteeism (14.86%) and student mobility (9.90%) indicate that many students experience instability that disrupts learning over time. The student homelessness rate (5.60%) is elevated relative to other district types, signaling that housing disruption is a particularly acute challenge in rural communities, though these figures should be interpreted with caution given suppressed or missing underlying counts. While kindergarten readiness (43.51%) is comparable to moderate-resource districts, these early advantages are often difficult to sustain in the presence of ongoing disruption.

These districts serve smaller, more geographically dispersed student populations, averaging 803 students with a median of 528, a scale that limits economies of scale and makes service delivery more challenging. Workforce capacity is particularly constrained: teacher salaries are the lowest across all four district types ($55,087), and when combined with a higher share of early-career teachers, this pattern signals meaningful workforce pipeline constraints that are difficult to address in geographically isolated communities with limited fiscal capacity. Access to counselors, psychologists, and social workers is also more limited than in higher-resource district types.

These districts serve predominantly white student populations, a pattern that does not indicate an absence of need. Rural and urban districts differ in racial composition and in the forms adversity takes, but elevated need and constrained capacity are present in both. Together, these patterns create a compounding dynamic in which elevated

levels of need meet limited institutional capacity to respond, underscoring the importance of strategies that expand access to services, strengthen workforce pipelines, and build regional coordination across neighboring districts facing similar conditions.

What This Suggests for Planning

School-Based Strategies (Inside the Classroom Door)

- Expand access to mental health and student support services using flexible delivery models, including telehealth.
- Strengthen teacher recruitment and retention through local pipeline and professional support strategies.
- Provide targeted academic supports and structured instructional frameworks that help early-career teachers deliver consistent, high-quality instruction despite workforce instability.

Cross-Sector Strategies (Outside the Classroom Door)

- Develop regional partnerships to share specialized staff and expand access to mental health and social services.
- Coordinate with community organizations to address housing and transportation barriers that contribute to absenteeism and mobility.
- Strengthen connections to early childhood systems to support readiness and smooth transitions into school.

Type 4: Resource-Rich, High-Performing Metro Districts

This profile highlights how strong institutional capacity interacts with uneven early learning conditions and disparities within districts, shaping opportunities for equity-focused improvement (see Table 5).

Table 5. Type 4: Resource-Rich, High-Performing Metro Districts Profile Snapshot

Domain	Indicator	Value	What it signals
Student Stability & Engagement	Chronic absenteeism	10.19%	Lowest across all district types
Disciplinary Context	In-school suspension rate	2.66%	Lowest across all district types
Housing Instability	Student mobility	5.07%	Lowest across all district types
Housing Instability	Student homelessness rate	1.08%*	Lowest across all district types
Early Learning Entry Conditions	Kindergarten readiness	37.56%	Lower than Type 1 despite stronger overall resources
Workforce Capacity	School psychologist ratio	1:673; 15% have no psychologist	Strongest psychologist access across district types
Workforce Capacity	School social worker ratio	1:321; 3.9% have no social worker	Strongest social worker access across district types

* Homelessness rate should be interpreted with caution due to suppression and missing underlying counts

Narrative Profile

The descriptive profile for Resource-Rich Metro Districts reflects the most stable student experience across all four district types. Chronic absenteeism (10.19%), in-school suspension rates (2.66%), student mobility (5.07%), and homelessness (1.08%) are all the lowest across district types, indicating a convergence of conditions associated with both stronger institutional capacity and more favorable community conditions outside the classroom door. These patterns are not incidental; they reflect the compounding advantage of districts in which positive school-level resources and community conditions build upon and reinforce each other. Type 4 districts also show a distinctive staffing pattern, with stronger investment in psychologists and social workers relative to counselors, a configuration that may reflect both fiscal capacity and deliberate prioritization of clinical support functions.

One finding is worth noting, however, because it tells a more complex story than the overall profile suggests. Kindergarten readiness (37.56%) is lower than in Type 1 moderate-resource districts (44.77%), despite Type 4's stronger overall resource profile. These districts serve large student populations, with a mean enrollment of 3,180, requiring coordination of services across complex systems.

Overall, this profile reflects districts where strong institutional capacity and stable student experiences converge, and where one planning consideration is the gap between resource strength and readiness at school entry.

What This Suggests for Planning

School-Based Strategies (Inside the Classroom Door)

- Strengthen early identification and intervention systems to respond to gaps in school readiness at the point of entry.
- Leverage strong workforce capacity to build internal professional learning and instructional improvement systems.

Cross-Sector Strategies (Outside the Classroom Door)

- Strengthen partnerships with early childhood providers to address gaps in kindergarten readiness and align PreK–3 systems.
- Strong institutional capacity in these districts may create opportunities for regional collaboration, such as sharing specialized staff, expertise, or program models with neighboring districts facing greater resource constraints.

Limitations

Although the domains and indicators included in this analysis were informed by research literature and the expertise of the research team, they do not represent an exhaustive set of factors shaping district conditions. Additional indicators may be relevant.

The profiles are descriptive and cross-sectional. They document patterns at a single point in time and cannot establish whether observed conditions cause student outcomes, or how conditions change over time. Future work could examine how these profiles evolve as new data become available.

Because the unit of analysis is at the district level, these profiles may mask meaningful variation within districts. This is particularly relevant for High-Need Urban Districts, where a small number of very large systems, including Chicago Public Schools, can skew averages in ways that do not reflect the experience of the typical district in that type.

Finally, several indicators carry data quality constraints documented in Table A-1. Readers should interpret homelessness rates, kindergarten readiness figures, and other indicators with suppressed underlying counts with appropriate caution.

Profile-Informed Pathways for Action

Conditions that originate outside schools cannot be addressed by schools alone. Cross-sector partners are a condition for effectiveness, not a supplement to school-based strategies.

This study develops descriptive profiles for the four district types identified in the companion brief. The findings suggest that while districts may share similar underlying conditions, how those conditions surface differs in ways that matter for planning.

By combining structural indicators with measures of student and school experience, this analysis provides a more complete picture of district conditions. The resulting profiles help clarify what districts need to consider both inside and outside the classroom door, offering a more grounded basis for aligning school-based strategies with cross-sector supports.

For example, student mobility and homelessness rates are elevated across High-Need Urban and High-Need Rural districts, yet housing stability is determined by systems and decisions that operate entirely outside school walls. Addressing those conditions requires housing authorities, community organizations, and social service agencies to be at the planning table alongside school leaders as essential partners. This kind of cross-sector coordination is not a supplement to school-based strategies; it is a condition for effectiveness.

Rather than prescribing a single set of interventions, these profiles highlight patterns that can guide more tailored, context-responsive decision-making. In doing so, the study moves from describing district types to helping leaders think through what those types mean for planning and action.

Statement of Independence and Integrity

Chapin Hall adheres to the values of science, meeting the highest standards of ethics, integrity, rigor, and objectivity in its research, analyses, and reporting. Learn more about the principles that drive our work in our Statement of Independence. Chapin Hall partners with policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropists at the forefront of research and policy development by applying a unique blend of scientific research, real-world experience, and policy expertise to construct actionable information, practical tools, and, ultimately, positive change for children and families. The authors of this brief are recognized leaders in the field of child welfare and are available to provide technical consultation and guidance as system leaders navigate this evolving policy landscape. Established in 1985, Chapin Hall's areas of research include child welfare systems, community capacity to support children and families, and youth homelessness. For more information about Chapin Hall, visit www.chapinhall.org or @Chapin_Hall.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Descriptive Indicator Domains and Research Foundations

This appendix provides additional detail on the conceptual domains and indicators used to develop district profiles in this brief. Each domain includes a summary of the indicator selected, what it captures, and research grounding that links the indicator to broader conditions shaping student outcomes. These descriptions reflect the criteria used to select indicators, ensuring they are theoretically relevant, contribute new information beyond the typology, and support interpretation of district conditions. While the main brief focuses on how these indicators differentiate district types and inform planning, this appendix summarizes the evidence base informing their selection.

Student Stability & Engagement (Chronic Absenteeism)

Student stability and engagement are reflected in indicators such as chronic absenteeism, which signals structural barriers to consistent attendance including housing instability, health challenges, and caregiving constraints (Coughenour et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2014; Sugrue et al., 2016). Although absenteeism is inversely associated with academic performance (Ansari & Pianta, 2019), it captures a distinct dimension of student experience (for example, engagement and stability) rather than academic achievement itself. Absenteeism is also frequently correlated with adverse community conditions, yet it reflects how those conditions manifest within schools rather than measuring the conditions directly. While high absenteeism can influence district accountability outcomes or attendance-based funding (Kearney et al., 2023), it is not a measure of institutional resources. As a result, chronic absenteeism provides a concrete signal of student engagement that provides a lens into how broader structural conditions affect day-to-day participation in school.

Housing Instability and Mobility (Student Homelessness and Mobility Rates)

Housing instability and mobility are reflected in indicators such as student homelessness and student mobility rates, which signal exposure to housing disruption that can undermine educational continuity and stability. These indicators are closely tied to broader patterns of adversity and place, including economic hardship, labor market precarity, and local housing market constraints, and they can indirectly influence both academic performance and district conditions by shaping the stability of students' learning environments (Cutuli et al., 2013; Desmond, 2017; Voight et al., 2012). Students who experience homelessness or frequent school changes often face interrupted instruction, disrupted relationships with teachers and peers, and increased social-emotional stress, which are conditions associated with lower engagement and achievement (Fantuzzo et al., 2012). While district resources may affect the supports available to these students, homelessness and mobility reflect lived experiences of instability rather than serving as measures of institutional capacity. Including these indicators helps surface patterns of disruption that may not be visible in aggregate academic or fiscal measures.

Early Learning Entry Conditions (Kindergarten Readiness – All Developmental Domains)

Early learning entry conditions are reflected in indicators such as kindergarten readiness, which captures children's developmental skills at the point they enter formal schooling. Measures of readiness typically include early literacy, numeracy, executive functioning, and social-emotional development, all of which are strongly associated with later academic engagement and achievement (Duncan et al., 2007; Hair et al., 2006). Readiness is shaped by early learning opportunities and home environments, and it is patterned by broader conditions of adversity and place, including family economic hardship, neighborhood disadvantage, and access to high-quality early childhood programs (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). While district resources influence the supports schools can provide once students enroll, readiness reflects developmental conditions present prior to sustained exposure to K–12 instruction. In this way,

kindergarten readiness highlights differences in where students begin, offering insight into early disparities that shape later outcomes.

Disciplinary Context (Suspension Rates)

Disciplinary context is reflected in indicators such as in-school suspension, which captures how districts respond to student behavior through exclusionary practices that remove students from regular instruction while keeping them in the school building. Although less severe than expulsion, suspension sits on the same continuum of exclusionary discipline and is associated with lost instructional time, poorer school performance, and higher risk of school dropout and later criminal justice involvement (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Both fall hardest on students and families already navigating other structural hardships, compounding gaps in access and achievement over time. Research shows that exclusionary discipline is patterned by broader structural conditions, including student demographic composition, community disadvantage, and local context, with Black students disproportionately affected even for similar behaviors (Gagnon et al., 2016; Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Shabazian, 2015). These patterns vary across urban and rural settings, indicating that disciplinary responses are shaped in part by place-based conditions and institutional context. In-school suspension does not measure academic performance or fiscal resources; instead, it reflects governance decisions about how schools respond to student behavior, offering insight into institutional practices that shape student experience beyond what structural indicators capture alone.

Equity Context (Racial and Ethnic Composition)

Equity context is reflected in indicators such as racial and ethnic composition, which captures how students are distributed across districts and how educational opportunity is organized. Racial and ethnic composition is closely tied to patterns of school and neighborhood segregation, which shape differences in school conditions, access to experienced teachers, and availability of educational programs (Ambali et al., 2025; Monarrez & Chien, 2021; Reardon et al., 2019). These patterns are also linked to differences in district fiscal environments, as reliance on local property tax bases can result in unequal funding and resource availability across districts serving different student populations (Bifulco & Souders, 2024; U.S. GAO, 2022; Morgan, 2022). As a result, racial and ethnic composition intersects with multiple dimensions of educational inequality, including community adversity, place-based segregation, fiscal conditions, and academic outcomes (Reardon et al., 2019). Examining these patterns helps reveal how structural inequities are distributed across districts and how they shape educational opportunity.

District Scale and Reach (Student Enrollment Size)

District scale and reach are reflected in indicators such as student enrollment size, which captures the number of students served and the scope of a district's educational system. Enrollment size varies widely across Illinois and influences how districts organize services, allocate staff, and implement supports across schools and student populations. Research suggests that smaller schools are often associated with higher attendance rates, lower dropout rates, and fewer disciplinary incidents, while larger systems may face greater challenges maintaining engagement and monitoring student outcomes (Howley et al., 2011; Lee & Smith, 1997). These relationships depend on local socioeconomic conditions and available resources, with districts that serve higher concentrations of students experiencing poverty often facing different operational demands (Howley et al., 2011). Enrollment size also can shape cost structures, as some evidence suggests per-pupil costs may decline as enrollment increases due to economies of scale (Andrews et al., 2002). Enrollment is considered in state funding formulas but does not directly measure fiscal capacity. Instead, it reflects the scale of district operations and the scope of services they are responsible for coordinating.

Workforce Capacity

Workforce capacity and support staffing are reflected in indicators such as teacher average salary, the share of teachers holding advanced degrees, the percentage of novice teachers, and the staffing levels of support roles

including school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and social workers. These indicators capture the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce, including access to both instructional and student support staff. Research demonstrates that educator workforce characteristics are strongly associated with student outcomes, including academic achievement, attendance, and disciplinary incidents (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Access to qualified teachers and adequate support staffing is unevenly distributed, with districts serving higher concentrations of students experiencing poverty more likely to face workforce shortages and higher turnover (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; García & Weiss, 2019; Sorensen & Ladd, 2018). While workforce conditions are shaped in part by district finances and geographic context, they reflect how resources are allocated into staffing and services within schools. These indicators therefore help illuminate differences in the level of support available to students and educators across district types.

Table A-1. Descriptive Indicators Used to Profile District Types

This table summarizes the indicators used to develop descriptive profiles of district types, including their associated domains, interpretive rationale, level of measurement, and data coverage. These indicators were selected to provide insight into student experiences, district conditions, and system capacity, and to support interpretation of differences across district types. Additional detail on the conceptual domains and research grounding for each indicator is provided in Appendix A.

Analytic Domain	Indicator	Interpretive Rationale	Missing/ Suppressed District Percent	Data Quality and Criteria for Inclusion
Student Stability & Engagement	Chronic absenteeism	Signals structural attendance barriers linked to housing, health, and caregiving constraints	1.2%	98.8% coverage; meets threshold; appropriate for inclusion in narrative and profile tables
Disciplinary Context	In-school suspension rate (CRDC)	Reflects institutional disciplinary practices and governance responses	0.8%	99.2% coverage; meets threshold; appropriate for inclusion in narrative and profile tables
Housing Instability	Student homelessness rate	Indicates exposure to housing disruption affecting educational continuity	0%*****	100% coverage; meets threshold; rate derived from enrollment count variable; 32.2% of underlying counts were suppressed by ISBE to protect privacy when data represented fewer than 10 students and imputed within the known range (1-9); 10.7% of underlying counts were blank and recorded as zero; all districts have a usable derived value
Housing Instability	Student mobility rate	Indicates exposure to housing disruption affecting educational continuity	8.3%*	91.7% coverage; meets threshold; suppressed values and true missing values treated as missing and excluded from class means; see * note; appropriate for inclusion in narrative and profile tables with caveat

Analytic Domain	Indicator	Interpretive Rationale	Missing/ Suppressed District Percent	Data Quality and Criteria for Inclusion
District Scale & Reach	Student enrollment size	Shapes feasible intervention intensity and implementation capacity	0%	100% coverage; meets threshold; report mean and median given influence of large urban districts
Equity Context	Percent student enrollment white	Describes racial and ethnic composition and situates district types within patterns of structural inequity	0%**	Percent enrollment figures are derived from count variables; where counts were suppressed by ISBE for privacy, values were imputed within the known suppression range (1–9); all districts have a usable derived value.
Equity Context	Percent student enrollment Black	Describes racial and ethnic composition and situates district types within patterns of structural inequity	0%**	Percent enrollment figures are derived from count variables; where counts were suppressed by ISBE for privacy, values were imputed within the known suppression range (1–9); all districts have a usable derived value.
Equity Context	Percent student enrollment Hispanic	Describes racial and ethnic composition and situates district types within patterns of structural inequity	0%**	Percent enrollment figures are derived from count variables; where counts were suppressed by ISBE for privacy, values were imputed within the known suppression range (1–9); all districts have a usable derived value.
Early Learning Entry Conditions	Kindergarten readiness (all domains)	Reflects conditions at school entry shaped by pre-K experiences and family stability	30.4%***	69.5% coverage among eligible districts; just below 70% threshold; included with explicit exception and caveat; suppression hides low readiness rates in small districts, so reported means are upper bounds; suppression is heaviest in Type 3 (40.8%).

Analytic Domain	Indicator	Interpretive Rationale	Missing/ Suppressed District Percent	Data Quality and Criteria for Inclusion
Workforce Capacity	Teacher average salary	Signals the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce	0.2%	99.8% coverage; meets threshold; appropriate for inclusion in narrative and profile tables
Workforce Capacity	Percent novice teachers	Signals the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce	6.7%	93.3% coverage; meets threshold; appropriate for inclusion in narrative and profile tables
Workforce Capacity	Pupil:school counselor ratio	Signals the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce	0%****	100% coverage; meets threshold; districts with no counselor included as zero; report percent of districts with no staff in narrative
Workforce Capacity	Pupil:school nurse ratio	Signals the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce	0%****	100% coverage; meets threshold; districts with no nurse included as zero; report percent of districts with no staff in narrative
Workforce Capacity	Pupil:school psychologist ratio	Signals the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce	0%****	100% coverage; meets threshold; districts with no psychologist included as zero; report percent of districts with no staff in narrative
Workforce Capacity	Pupil:school social worker ratio	Signals the availability, qualifications, and composition of the district workforce	0%****	100% coverage; meets threshold; districts with no social worker included as zero; report percent of districts with no staff in narrative

* Includes values suppressed by ISBE for privacy (numerator < 10) and true missing values; both are treated as missing in this analysis. Unlike indicators derived from count variables, student mobility rate is provided only as a pre-calculated rate in the Illinois Report Card, so suppressed values cannot be recovered through imputation; affected districts are excluded from class means.

** Percent enrollment figures are derived from count variables; where counts were suppressed by ISBE for privacy, values were imputed within the known suppression range (1–9); all districts have a usable derived value.

Analytic Domain	Indicator	Interpretive Rationale	Missing/ Suppressed District Percent	Data Quality and Criteria for Inclusion

*** Denominator restricted to elementary and unit districts (n=754; 742 in the by-type table, as 12 eligible districts have no class assignment), identified from ISBE's District Type field on the KIDS sheet; high school districts (n=96) do not serve kindergartners and are excluded from the denominator rather than counted as missing. Per ISBE business rules, the rate is suppressed when fewer than 10 kindergartners demonstrate readiness in all three developmental areas (Illinois State Board of Education, 2024). Because that threshold is a count rather than a rate, it removes low-readiness districts with small kindergarten cohorts while retaining high-readiness ones of the same size: a district with 20 kindergartners must reach 50% readiness to clear the threshold, while a district with 400 needs only 2.5%.

**** All districts have a usable value for this indicator. Districts with no staff in this role are included with a value of zero, reflecting the absence of that service. The percent of districts with no staff in each role is reported in the narrative.

***** Rate derived from enrollment count variable. Of the underlying counts, 32.2% were suppressed by ISBE and imputed within the known range (1–9), and 10.7% were blank and recorded as zero, for a combined 42.9% of missing or suppressed data.