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Good news: Public schools are performing well

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In our constant 24/7 social media news cycle, it is common for negative news to rise to the top as it quickly draws the attention of viewers. This can result in a negative and pessimistic view of our world today and hinder the optimism and hope that is so important. While often less sensational than negative news, the media could cite many positive narratives, statistics and facts. Nicholas Kristof, in a recent New York Times editorial (This Has Been the Best Year Ever), outlined impressive global poverty and health statistics that could be positive news headlines. These include:

- The percentage of children dying by the age of 15 has dropped to 4 percent. As recently as 1950, it was 27 percent.
- Every single day, 325,000 people got their first access to electricity, 200,000 got piped water for the first time and 650,000 went on line for the first time.
- The percentage of the planet's population experiencing extreme poverty has plunged from 42 percent in 1981 to 10 percent today.
- As recently as 50 years ago, half of the world's population was illiterate. Today, we are approaching 90 percent adult literacy.

These statistics are wonderful news, yet TV news and social media often focus on bad news and leave us believing every trend is going in the wrong direction. This often happens when the media report about public education. News headlines often reference failing schools, low test scores and unmotivated students. In reality, public schools, nationally and in Illinois, are achieving the highest marks ever on key metrics. These notable statistics include:

- Illinois' four-year graduation rate is the highest ever at 86 percent, according to Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).
- College enrollment, within 12 months of graduation, grew to 72.5%, according to ISBE.
- For every major racial and ethnic group in America, student achievement is higher today than it was in the 1970s, according to the National Superintendents Roundtable and Horace Mann League.
- 76% of parents assign an A or B to the public school their oldest child attends, according to PDK Poll of America's Attitude Toward the Public Schools.
- Nationwide, during the past 10 years the number of students taking one or more Advanced Placement exams each year has increased by two-thirds to more than 2.8 million, according to College Board.

These statistics are impressive given that public schools are serving more than 50 million students (90% of all students), more students with special needs (13%) and more students in poverty than ever before. Be encouraged to counter any negative

thinking and celebrate the great job that your local public schools play in educating our children and serving your community.