

Avoca School District 37 placed on financial "Recognition" list by state board of education

SCHOOLS

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The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has placed Avoca School District 37 on its financial "Recognition" list.

ISBE rates school districts on their fund balance and expenditure-to-revenue ratios, days of cash on hand, and percentage of remaining short- and long-term borrowing ability.

Of Illinois' 852 school districts, 632, or 74 percent, earned the state's "Financial Recognition" designation, suggesting they are fiscally sound.

The other 26 percent statewide, of 220 districts, received lower marks from ISBE, suggesting they need work:

154 (18 percent) are under "Financial Review"

47 (6 percent) were given an "Early Warning"

19 (2 percent) are under "Financial Watch", including Chicago Public Schools and seven others in the Metro-East.

In Cook County, 128 of the county's 154 school districts (83 percent) earned the "Financial Recognition" designation.

7 districts -- West Harvey-Dixmoor Public School District 147, Bellwood School District 88, Berwyn South School District 100, Burnham School District 154-5, Reavis Township High School District 220, La Grange School District 102, Thornton Township High School District 205 -- were placed under "Early Warning."

18 districts -- Ford Heights School District 169, Argo Community High School District 217, Western Springs School District 101, Wheeling Community Consolidated School District 21, Brookwood School District 167, Homewood School District 153, Prospect Heights School District 23, Komarek School District 94, La Grange School District 105 South, River Grove School District 85.5, Cicero School District 99, Country Club Hills School District 160, Lyons School District 103, Elmwood Park Community Unit School District 401, Elementary School District 159, Evanston-Skokie Community Consolidated School District 65, Evergreen Park Elementary School District 124, Thornton School District 154 -- were placed under "Financial Review."

Chicago Public School District 299 was the only district placed under "Financial Watch."

ISBE reports that districts are increasingly "borrowing to obtain needed cash flow" and "continue to issue long-term debt to sustain day-to-day operations."

Schools are "continuing to break even or are spending more than they are realizing in revenue," the report says.

Illinois public school districts issued \$307.2 million in long-term debt in fiscal year 2015 versus \$356.5 million in fiscal year 2014. In 2015, 499 -- or 58 percent-- spent more money than they took in, borrowing or using taxpayer-provided reserves to cover the deficit.

ISBE's "School District Financial Profile" was first issued in 2003.