

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** District Superintendents  
Directors of Special Education Cooperatives and Entities  
Interested Organizations and Individuals

**FROM:** Robert E. Schiller  
State Superintendent of Superintendent

**DATE:** February 24, 2004

**SUBJECT:** School District Policies on Social and Emotional Development

Mental health is as important to children's overall health, well-being and academic success as physical health, yet little attention is usually placed on this issue until problems become severe. The Illinois Children's Mental Health Task Force comprised of over 100 state agencies and organizations, including educators, released a ground-breaking report in April 2003, [\*Children's Mental Health: An Urgent Priority for Illinois\*](#), calling for reform to the existing mental health system to ensure that the full range of children's social and emotional needs are addressed across the continuum of prevention/promotion, early identification/intervention, and treatment.

Illinois has taken a significant step towards ensuring that a comprehensive mental health system is available to all children through passage of the [Children's Mental Health Act of 2003](#) (Public Act 93-0495, see [Fact Sheet](#)). Recognizing the important role that education plays in this system, the Act requires ISBE to develop and implement a plan that incorporates social/emotional development standards into the Illinois Learning Standards. The Act also requires school districts to develop policies that address the role of social/emotional development in district education programs and submit those policies to ISBE by August 31, 2004.

Many Illinois school districts have already recognized the importance of social/emotional development and have implemented policies and related programs and activities. Often such policies are incorporated within overall comprehensive school health policies. In developing your policies and practices, school districts are encouraged to review existing efforts to assess what is presently in place. **To assist school districts in developing or strengthening policies and practices, the following resources are available or forthcoming.**

- [\*Core Components of a Comprehensive School District Policy on Social and Emotional Development\*](#), developed by the School Policies and Standards Committee of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership (a planning and monitoring body created by the Children's Mental Health Act), which includes representatives from ISBE, has developed the attached fact sheet.
- Additional guidance on sample policies, best practices and resources for each of the core components, and a format for submission of the school district policies are forthcoming in the 4-6 weeks.

In the meantime, you may wish to review a comprehensive school health policy, available through the National Association of School Boards at [www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/Health\\_Policies.html](http://www.nasbe.org/HealthySchools/Health_Policies.html). Additional information on social and emotional development policies is available through the Center for Mental Health in Schools at [www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu](http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu) and the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning at [www.casel.org/home/index.php](http://www.casel.org/home/index.php).