Weekly Message from State Superintendent Randy Dunn

Good afternoon. It disturbs me that, for another week, working through the Harcourt situation will consume the bulk of my opener. Before getting to that, though, I would like to take a moment or two to share some other information that helps keep all of this other stuff in perspective, at least for me.

As I write this week’s message, I’ve just returned from a visit with the board, staff and students of Southeastern High School in Augusta, who lost their high school building to a fire ten days ago. Through the quick work of Superintendent Mike Owen, Principal Todd Fox and his staff members, all the students, faculty and staff got out of the building quickly and safely. And then they got back to school…quickly!…utilizing available space at their junior high building and in a church education center across the street. As SHS works to move forward, I was impressed by these close-knit communities and how they’re coming together for the sake of the students.

Then, traveling back through west central Illinois to Springfield, I saw the devastation that last night’s tornadoes and severe weather brought to the area. Many central Illinois districts cancelled classes today because of damage to buildings and power outages. As was the case in Augusta, it’s a blessing that there are no serious injuries that have been reported to students or school personnel. As we’re doing with the Southeastern District, our Agency staff will work with the central Illinois districts that have sustained storm damage to help with their immediate needs and support them as they make their plans for repair and getting back to normal.

But now, back to the issue at hand…Amidst all of this, we continue to be dissatisfied with Harcourt Assessment's delivery of testing materials to districts. I assure you that Becky McCabe and our Student Assessment Division staff members continue to work the details of this situation on a minute-by-minute basis with Harcourt. And, like many of you, they just finished working through a second weekend to chase down problems and get them resolved.

As we’ve been pushing Harcourt to get the correct test materials to you, we’ve also been finalizing a plan focused on assuring the reliability and validity of what happens next with the ISAT—the scoring and reporting of test results. We will put some or all of the following measures in place to ensure the validity of the scoring and reporting:

- contracting with a separate vendor to do parallel runs to check accuracy;
- matching up student ID numbers, raw bubbles on books to score reports, and individual to group reports;
- asking a statistically valid sample of cooperating districts/schools to review findings from certain runs (i.e. “Is Johnny Smith a boy in the fourth grade at this school? Does it seem right that he would have 75 percent of the answers incorrect on this test? Would he have missed these certain questions?” etc.);
- expanding the school checks up to the full production run if problems are noted; and
- tracking student performance on the test’s anchor items to see any unanticipated movement on the anchors.

The State Board of Education, when it meets later this week, will be hearing from Harcourt’s senior managers who will be present in Springfield for that meeting. As I noted in my press conference this past Thursday, we will be looking at every available avenue for securing the necessary level of testing services from a vendor in 2006-07. As we look...
ahead to the ongoing status of Harcourt’s work with the ISAT this year, we are also pressing them to reinforce their detailed timeline, processes and deliverables for the upcoming Prairie State Achievement Exam. They must deliver the right materials to the right schools at the right time for the PSAE. Nothing short of this is acceptable.

Just a reminder for the ISAT, we have put procedures in place:

- All Districts that have not begun testing who feel that they haven’t had enough time to distribute their testing materials can complete a form to request adjustment of testing dates due to late delivery of materials: http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/Late_Materials_Mod_Form.pdf
- Districts that have incurred expenses related to the delays and other problems with Harcourt’s delivery of testing materials are asked to submit claims in invoice format to ISBE. ISBE will seek payment of those claims from Harcourt on each District’s behalf.

Please send Invoices printed on District Letterhead for Incurred Assessment Copying, Overtime and Transportation Expenses to:

Ms. Dorie Konneker, State Board of Education
100 North First Street, Mail Code S-405
Springfield, IL 62777
Email: dkonneke@isbe.net
Fax: 217-785-3972

On each Invoice, please provide as much detail as possible, including information such as:

- number of copies
- subject/test
- grade level
- specific titles for which overtime incurred
- specific tasks for which transportation costs incurred

To reach ISBE’s Student Assessment Division by phone, call 217-782-4823 or toll-free 1-866-262-6663. Send email contacts to rmccabe@isbe.net. We will continue keep you updated with information by email and with announcements at http://www.isbe.net/assessment. As I said before, and must say again, we appreciate your patience and your dedication to being well prepared for testing. We will continue to work the emails that we receive here if you experience problems. Please contact us with specific issues that come up in your district.

We’ll continue to send out information to you as the testing period continues. We also continue to appreciate your cooperation and commitment as we work together to identify and solve the delivery problems across the state.

Randy Dunn

Upcoming Deadlines

- 21st Century Community Learning Center Proposals – March 15, 2006
- Textbook Loan Program – March 22, 2006*
- Norwegian National League Scholarships – March 15, 2006
- Bilingual Education Program Delivery Report (PDR) – March 31, 2006
- American Stars of Teaching Award nominations – April 15, 2006
- Nature of Learning Start-Up Grants – April 17, 2006
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs Art Contest – May 31, 2006
- Public Comment on Special Education Rulemaking – September 15, 2006
**Fiscal and Administrative Services**

*Extension of Textbook Loan Program deadline*

Due to the tornado and storm damage in the Springfield area and the resulting downtime of the IWAS system, the deadline for school districts to order textbooks through the Illinois Textbook Loan Program has been extended to March 22.

**Special Message from Governor’s Office**

.Flags at State buildings to fly at half staff on March 18*

Governor Blagojevich has ordered flags at all State of Illinois buildings to fly at half staff on Saturday, March 18, to honor Army Staff Sgt. Edwin H. Dazachacon, 38, of Belleville. Dazachacon died north of Deh Rawod, Afghanistan, on February 13, 2006 when an improvised explosive device detonated near his HMMWV during combat operations. He was supporting Operation Enduring Freedom. Dazachacon was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Flying flags at half staff is optional for schools. This information is shared at the request of schools and Regional Offices of Education.

**Federal Grants and Programs**

**Illinois e-Plans**


The *Illinois e-Plans District Improvement Template* may be used by districts in improvement status and academic watch status, by districts that did not meet Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO) for two consecutive years and by districts receiving Supplemental General State Aid (SGAS) with an Average Daily Attendance (ADA) of more than 1,000 and less than 50,000.

*Illinois e-Plans* significantly streamline the process of submitting required improvement plans to local boards and ISBE. However, the use of the Template is not required. Schools and districts may continue to use a format that complies with relevant federal and state laws.

The *Illinois e-Plans* system is designed to be user-friendly and a welcome addition to Illinois’ system of support to schools and districts. Districts and schools will have multiple years (including 2005) of School Report Card data and information at their fingertips automatically populating the screens at the IIRC web site.

Districts may use the same passwords that were previously distributed to access the *Illinois e-Plans*. These passwords are also available by calling Gail Buoy, Federal Grants and Programs, 217-524-4832. NIU will also email passwords by the end of the week to district superintendents.

**Grant Opportunities**

**Allstate Foundation supports national and local programs**

- **Safe and Vital Communities** including: catastrophe response; youth anti-violence, neighborhood revitalization and teen safe driving.
- **Tolerance, inclusion and diversity** including: Teaching tolerance to youth; ending hate crimes; and alleviating discrimination.

There is no deadline for submission: [http://www.allstate.com/Community/PageRender.asp?Page=contactfound.html](http://www.allstate.com/Community/PageRender.asp?Page=contactfound.html)

Contact:
Midwest Region, The Allstate Foundation
Ms. Lisa Miner
2150 East Lake Cook Rd, 11th Floor
Buffalo Grove, IL 60089
Phone: 847-667-8108

**State Farm Insurance supports Community Grants**

- **Safe Neighbors**: Supporting disaster preparedness programs and recovery services
- **K-12 Public Schools**: Teacher excellence programs that improve teacher quality; Service-Learning programs that integrate core classroom
curriculum with service to the community; Programs that incorporate Systematic Improvement criteria into educational systems to improve overall effectiveness.

Proposals are accepted year-round. Visit http://www.statefarm.com/foundati/cogrants.htm for guidelines and instructions to apply.

Congressional Hunger Center and Victory Wholesale Grocers grants to hunger-fighting organizations

Washington, DC – February 26, 2006 – The Congressional Hunger Center and Victory Wholesale Grocers of Springboro, Ohio and Boca Raton, Florida, are announcing the 2006 Fourteenth Anniversary “Victory Against Hunger Awards.” The awards are fifteen $1,000 grants to be presented to anti-hunger organizations, food banks, schools, state agencies and nutrition and health groups. The total unrestricted grants from Victory Wholesale Grocers have now reached $218,000 since their inception in 1993.

A panel of experts will choose awardees based on their success in achieving the goal expressed by this year’s theme, “Fighting Hunger through Developing and/or Implementing Local and State School Meals Wellness Policies.” Organizations or schools that can demonstrate innovative local or state wellness policies for school children are eligible for a Victory Against Hunger Award.

Under the Hunger Awards program, potential awardees may only be nominated by a member of U.S. Congress. The application process consists of a one or two page letter from a member of Congress to the Congressional Hunger Center highlighting the nominee’s efforts in “Fighting Hunger through Developing and/or Implementing Local and State School Meals Wellness Policies.” The nomination period is April 10 through May 31, 2006. Awards will be made in July. Congressional nomination letters should be addressed to Victory Against Hunger, c/o Congressional Hunger Center, 229 ½ Pennsylvania Ave, SE, Washington, DC 20003. The name and telephone number, including area code, of a contact person from the Congressional office accepting the check must accompany each nomination.

For additional information about the Congressional Hunger Center, visit http://www.hungercenter.org/.

Employment Opportunities

Higher Education

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office of Continuing Education is seeking a Program Director for Programs for Educators and Human Services Professionals. Information is available at http://www.continuinged.uiuc.edu/. Click on employment.

ISBE employment opportunities

External Vacancy List

An External Vacancy List for the Illinois State Board of Education is available at: http://www.isbe.net/hr/Default.htm.

In the News

Weekly news clips

Highlights from last week’s education news clips are posted at: http://www.isbe.net/news/2006/newsclips/060310.htm.