Good afternoon,

This is my first column as the newly appointed Superintendent for Illinois Schools. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Governor and the State Board of Education for the confidence they have expressed in my abilities. I also want to thank our Agency staff for their hard work and continuous dedication, during this recent time of transition. I look forward to continuing to work with all of you in the years ahead as we work to make education in Illinois ‘Second to None.’

One of our first opportunities is the upcoming Prairie State Achievement Examination. This week, most 11th graders will be taking the PSAE test. I know many schools have been preparing their students for the actual administration of the test on Wednesday and Thursday. While teachers and administrators know the importance of these tests for their schools and districts, some of our students may not view them with the same sense of urgency.

While the PSAE is used to determine AYP for schools and districts, the state has worked diligently to have these assessments focus on state standards, college and career readiness. Our schools, students, families and communities must look closely at what we are assessing, how it impacts learning and instruction and place the effort in closing the gaps and increasing achievement. Recently, we signed a memorandum of understanding with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Office of the Governor that will essentially help us to better identify ways to prepare students for success after high school, whether that means college or university, trade or technical school, apprenticeship training, military or straight into the workforce. Our overall goal as educators is not simply to make sure a student passes from one grade to the next, but rather we give them a foundation for success in life. We have outstanding high schools and educators who know that in order to best prepare students our curriculum and instruction must be based on good information about learning. State assessments are just one tool – they were never meant to be more than one measure. High school personnel use a variety of data, information and tools to assist with instruction and our partnership with the Gates Foundation and Governor’s office will help us to realize even greater potential for our high school students.

It is hard to motivate 17-year-olds for a test, but we hope that your work within classrooms throughout their education will be shown in the results of the PSAE. This assessment is one of many; yet it is a critical one for schools and students. We have included the ACT and WorkKeys in the PSAE because it can provide students with other measures that will assist them in their life after high school. My hope is that teachers, administrators and others who are in daily contact with our 11th graders take just a minute or two between now and testing to speak with them about the importance of these tests on their futures.

Good luck and have a great week. I look forward to serving you as State Superintendent.

Chris Koch
Upcoming Deadlines

- Mathematics and Science Partnership program RFP – April 30, 2007
- Preschool for All Children Ages 3 to 5 years RFP – May 3, 2007
- Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Young Scholars Program – May 7, 2007
- Truants’ Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAOEP) Professional Development RFP – May 31, 2007
- ‘Teacher Service Record’ salary submission – June 15, 2007
- Waiver applications to be considered by the General Assembly in Fall 2007 – August 10, 2007

Accountability

McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program FY08 RFP released

The McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program FY 08 Request for Proposals (RFP) for new funds has been released. Applicants eligible to submit a proposal for this homeless education program serving homeless families, children and youth in Illinois includes schools, districts, Regional Offices of Education, and public university laboratory schools approved by ISBE. Charter schools are also eligible to apply for the area in which they are located.

The RFP is available online at [http://www.isbe.net/homeless/default.htm](http://www.isbe.net/homeless/default.htm) and can also be obtained by contacting the Accountability Division, Homeless Education at 217-782-2948.

The Homeless Education bidder’s conference will be held electronically at the ISBE Bulletin Board, under Homeless Forum – [http://bb1.isbe.net/idealbb/default.asp](http://bb1.isbe.net/idealbb/default.asp).

Registration for the bulletin board is required to access the electronic bidders conference forum, which will be open until May 29, 2007. Should the conditions of the RFP change as a result of the bidder’s conference, the State Board of Education will notify all recipients of the RFP of the changes.

For more information, contact Peggy Dunn, Homeless Education Coordinator, at 217-782-2948 or madunn@isbe.net.

Regional Safe Schools Program continuation application

The continuation application for Regional Safe Schools Program (RSSP) has been posted at [http://www.isbe.net/accountability/pdf/08_RSSP_application.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/accountability/pdf/08_RSSP_application.pdf).

Regional Safe Schools provide alternative programs for disruptive youth in grades six through twelve. Eligible applicants are Regional Offices of Education, Intermediate Service Centers and Chicago Public Schools. The deadline to submit the application is Friday, May 25, 2007.

If you have any questions contact Sally Veach at 217-782-2948 or sveach@isbe.net.

Special Education

Changes in Special Education division

The Illinois State Board of Education wishes to express its great thanks to John Herner who has served for the past six months as interim Director of ISBE’s Special Education Services. John brought a lifetime of experience in Special Education and filled in admirably during this time of transition for the agency. He will be leaving the agency on May 1st to return to his family and grandchildren in Ohio.

We will be posting the vacancy for Assistant Superintendent for Special Education in the near future. I have appointed Beth Hanselman in an acting capacity beginning May 1, until such time a final determination is
made. Jodi Fleck will be assuming Beth’s former duties during this interim period.

Federal Grants & Programs

Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) Program – Seventh Annual Safe School Symposium

The Illinois State Board of Education, in conjunction with the Regional Office of Education #12/Safe Schools, invites districts across Illinois to participate in the 7th Annual Safe School Symposium from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Friday, May 4, 2007, at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, in Springfield, Ill.

More information can be found online at: http://www.isbe.net/pdf/safe_school_2007.pdf. For additional information, contact Albert J. Holmes at 312-814-3618, aholmes@isbe.net or Diane Taylor at 618-3395-8626, dtaylor@roe12.net.

Legal

Update on FBI Background Checks: Adam Walsh Child Protection & Safety Act of 2006

On March 7, 2007, Governor Blagojevich signed a letter making the provisions of the Adam Walsh Child Protection & Safety Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-248) accessible to certain educational entities in Illinois. This will impact the education community in many areas, particularly by broadening the scope of availability of fingerprint-based background checks through the FBI to public universities, public and private schools, and non-public special education facilities. The entities affected are primarily those that fall outside the parameters of 105 ILCS 5/10-21.9 of the School Code in regards to background check permissibility. ISP has developed a brochure for reference, which is available online at: http://www.isbe.net/pdf/Adam_Walsh.pdf.

Please note that while this new Act permits access to the FBI repository for national background checks, it did not affect Illinois state law in regards to the state-level background check. If you were conducting UCIA checks before, you must still conduct UCIA checks now; alternatively, if you were conducting fee applicant checks before, you will still conduct fee applicant checks. Further, Adam Walsh does not require student teachers to submit to background checks, nor does Illinois law. Adam Walsh provides only the means to conduct national background checks, if desired by the entities involved.

The letter signed by the Governor requested that the FBI provide Illinois with a statewide ORI number to be used by these entities to access the FBI repository of criminal history records. This process may take several weeks. Any such entity that wishes to participate (conduct fingerprint-based criminal history records checks through the FBI) will be required to sign a User Agreement with the ISP.

Public Universities

Public universities in Illinois now have the ability to conduct fingerprint-based background checks on their students entering teacher preparation programs, and may share those reports with public and private elementary and secondary schools at which the student will be engaging in student teaching or other clinical or practical experiences. The university must sign a User Agreement with the ISP to obtain use of an ORI number for this purpose.

Private Universities

Private Universities were not granted the same authority under Adam Walsh as public universities. These universities may still only conduct UCIA background checks through the ISP on students entering into teacher preparation programs.

A public or private elementary or secondary school district accepting a student for student teaching may use its Adam Walsh Act ORI number to conduct an FBI background check on that student (see below).

Public & Private Elementary & Secondary Schools

Public and private elementary & secondary schools may now conduct fingerprint-based background checks through the FBI on university students that will be student teaching or engaging in other clinical or practical activities in their schools. The school must sign a User Agreement with the ISP to obtain use of an ORI number for this purpose.

Non-public special education facilities

The Adam Walsh Act also provides that non-public special education facilities governed by Section 14-7.02 of the School Code are now authorized to conduct fingerprint-based background checks on employees of the facility as required by 105 ILCS 5/10-21.9(f). These facilities may share the background check reports with the schools with which they contract to provide services to severely disabled children. The facility must sign a
User Agreement with the ISP to obtain use of an ORI number for this purpose.

Questions about the Adam Walsh Act can be directed to Marcel Reid, Illinois State Police, at 815-740-5178 or ISBE counsel Jessica Jacobson at 312-814-2236.

**Employment Opportunities**

**ISBE 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**

ISBE has posted highlights from last week’s education news clips at: