Good afternoon.

Many of you know that over my 20-some months serving as State Superintendent, I have both praised and panned elements of NCLB (usually more panning than praising). During the time the law has been in existence, some of the most helpful policy analysis and reporting has come from the Center on Education Policy (CEP), a Washington DC-based independent, nonpartisan advocacy group for public education and effective public schools. One of CEP’s most important publications is their annual study of NCLB’s policy effects and associated rules and regulations—the *From the Capital to the Classroom* series.

The fourth-year study was recently released by the CEP, so my comments today will focus on *From the Capital to the Classroom: Year 4 of the No Child Left Behind Act*. The report is based on a comprehensive national study including a survey of education officials in all 50 states, a survey of 299 local school districts and in-depth case studies in 38 geographically diverse districts, including the Chicago Public Schools.

Overall, the report shows a majority of school leaders reporting achievement gains coupled with concerns related to funding, narrowed curriculum focus, quality of Supplemental Education Services (SES) providers and consistent accountability while implementing flexibility.

The survey results include:

- NCLB funding is a major concern for many districts, with 80 percent of districts reporting that their cost to implement NCLB exceeds the federal funds they receive;
- Curriculum is being adjusted to align with academic standards and assessments while struggling students are getting increased instruction time in math and reading at the expense of time spent in other subjects; and
- Monitoring the quality and effectiveness of SES providers is a big challenge for districts and states, with the average number of Supplemental Education Service providers in each district growing from 4 in 2002-2003 to 20 in 2004-2005, with more than half of them being for-profit organizations.

This year’s study also found that 54 percent of Title I schools identified for improvement nationwide are in urban districts, although only 27 percent of Title I schools overall are in urban districts. These numbers appear to be in conflict with the fact that urban districts match suburban and rural districts in rates of student improvement and teachers becoming highly qualified. The report concludes that large urban districts are failing to make AYP at the same rate as suburban or rural districts because of their large number of subgroups and schools compared to rural or suburban districts which often have only one or two subgroups and one school per grade span.

While the CEP report concludes that NCLB has indeed raised learning expectations and put an important focus on improving the achievement of subgroups that have often struggled, it makes some clear recommendations, including:

- Federal funds should be earmarked for NCLB implementation and the Federal government should reverse the trend of education funding cuts;
- USED should work toward a balanced curriculum that improves instruction in math and reading without losing learning time in other subjects;
- USED should publish final rules to govern how and when flexible methods are used and provide the necessary support in the form of funding and technical assistance so that all districts can implement flexibility; and
- USED should begin a pilot program to allow districts to offer SES in year one of school improvement instead of school choice.
The CEP report credits new national and state flexibility with keeping the number of schools making AYP each year fairly constant (as proficiency requirements increase) and improving the percentage of students performing at or above a proficient level on state tests. CEP plans to make a study of this flexibility the focus of next year’s report.

As we watch the national debate get underway with respect to the reauthorization of NCLB in 2007, I think it is helpful for all us involved in the education enterprise to review findings such as these to inform our policy discussions. I will try to share other similar information over the coming months as well as it becomes available.

The full study is available online at: http://www.cep-dc.org/nclb/Year4/Press/

Have a great week and enjoy the summer weather—it’s my favorite time of year.

Randy Dunn

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**Upcoming Deadlines**

- Student Advisory Council Applications – **June 7, 2006**
- High School Challenge: Rigor and Relevance Meet Reality registration – **June 12, 2006**
- Proposed Public School Calendar – **June 15, 2006**
- Aramco Teachers to Saudi Arabia application – **June 15, 2006**
- Midwest Clean Diesel Initiative Grant applications – **June 16, 2006**
- Rules Public Comment – **June 19, 2006**
- National High School Journalism Teacher Awards applications – **July 1, 2006**
- Rules Public Comment Deadline, Part 1 and Part 565 – **July 17, 2006**
- Waiver applications to be considered by General Assembly in November – **August 11, 2006**
- Public Comment on Special Education Rulemaking – **September 15, 2006**

**NCLB**

**AYP appeals process**

School districts may appeal their district or school status to the Illinois State Board of Education. A letter from the district superintendent to the State Superintendent of Education for consideration by the Appeals Advisory Committee, listing the issue and rationale for the appeal, begins the process. The details are available online at: http://www.isbe.net/assessment/pdfs/appeals_status.pdf.

**Fiscal Guidance**

The U.S. Department of Education (USED) has released final fiscal guidance making clear that schools operating a Title I schoolwide program that consolidates all funding streams into a single account are exempt from certain reporting requirements under the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Circular A-87.

The guidance, officially unveiled on Friday covers six Title I fiscal issues: maintenance of effort, comparability, supplement not supplant, carryover, consolidation of funds in schoolwide programs and grantback requirements.

A copy of the final guidance is available online in PDF form at: http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/fiscalguid.pdf.

**Student Opportunities and Honors**

**State Student Advisory Council seeks members**

The Illinois State Board of Education is currently seeking applications for the Student Advisory Council (SAC) to the Illinois State Board of Education for the 2006-07 school year. The SAC is made up of students representing all regions of the state. Members are invited to attend Board meetings, sessions of the General Assembly and applicable education-related conferences. They may review and critique ISBE’s existing or proposed programs, policies and regulations, sponsor cooperatively with the ISBE conferences, seminars, etc., pertaining to student-related, education issues, inform Illinois students of SAC activities and provide testimony at legislative or board hearings.
Eligibility to apply for the 2006-2007 SAC is limited to public school students. Given the need to hear from students on some of the more complicated issues faced by our state, special consideration will be given to applicants from low-performing schools or districts. An application form, due June 7, 2006 is now available at: http://www.isbe.net/pdf/sac_application.pdf. Activities of the Student Advisory Council in 2006-2007 are contingent upon final State Board budget allocations.

School Business

Employer responsibilities for notification

The Social Security Protection Act of 2004 requires employers to provide a statement to employees hired January 1, 2005 or later and not covered under Social Security. The statement explains how a pension from that job could affect future Social Security benefits to which they may become entitled. Form SSA-1945, Statement Concerning Your Employment in a Job Not Covered by Social Security is the document that employers should use to meet the law’s requirements. Employers must:

- Give the statement to the employee prior to the start of employment;
- Get the employee’s signature on the form; and
- Submit a copy of the signed form to the pension paying agency.

The form is available online at: http://www.socialsecurity.gov/form1945/. To request paper copies email oplm.oswm.rqct.orders@ssa.gov or FAX 410-965-2037. Forms are available in packs of 25. Refer to Inventory Control Number (ICN) 276950 when ordering.

Nutrition

Bookmark National School Lunch Week site, Vote for School Lunch theme

The School Nutrition Association invites food service professionals to visit their newly updated Vote for School Lunch, National School Lunch website at www.schoolnutrition.org/vote.

National School Lunch Week is celebrated October 9 through 13, 2006. Learn how the voting works in this celebration, menus and a fact sheet on National School Lunch Week. Bookmark the website and visit it this summer for other useful information such as logos, a toolkit with great ideas and fun resources to promote the event.