Good afternoon…working today from the sweltering City of Chicago. Of course, such is true for every city, town, village and crossroads in the Land of Lincoln.

As you know from my absence in writing the opener for the Weekly Message these past couple of weeks, I’ve been busy traveling. Two weeks ago I attended the Summer Institute of the Council of Chief State School Officers; last week was the National Association of System Heads/Education Trust P-16 State Networks Institute. By some unusual coincidence, both meetings took place out west—CCSSO in Oregon and NASH/Ed Trust in Montana. While it was enjoyable seeing the mountains, I was glad (as I always am) to get back on the prairie.

If you’ve been asleep for the past couple of years and yet have any question where the national education agenda is going, one only needs to attend these meetings. Both conferences were heavily populated by the usual suspects (business titans, think tank gurus, foundation funders, some leading academics, etc.) who of late have enjoyed a prominent role in shaping where the states—and by extension, each of your schools and districts—will go in education policy and practice.

For those who may have speculated that the recent, predominant focus on secondary school reform may wane, evidence from these meetings does not support your premise. You notice that I have used the term secondary school reform here. That’s intentional. There was a clear sense among the policy types that attention to high school reform solely provided too-narrow a perspective and needed to expand toward an emphasis on secondary schools in general (i.e., high schools and middle schools).

Within the broad scope of secondary school issues, then, the task of identifying what it will take for American students to be globally competitive (including opportunities to learn world languages and cultures) and how state education agencies should address this global imperative became key. And as we’ve learned to anticipate, the expectations of business leaders about the knowledge and skill base needed by today’s workforce provided a strong chord throughout these kinds of discussions.

It is also clear that the education policy community has almost wholly adopted a universal college-ready standard (creating a special set of challenges for those in higher education who have to find effective strategies to accelerate learning and help students who arrive behind, to catch up academically). Algebra II has taken on the mantle of serving as the gatekeeper to college preparation and success in higher education. In a related vein, district and state initiatives that set aggressive goals for student enrollment in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) fields were especially popular with conference-goers.

I’m not sure where I am on all of this. Certainly, I want our high schools to have sufficient rigor to allow a student to succeed in whatever career and post-secondary experience he or she wishes to pursue. And we certainly have an adjunct duty in our schools to ensure that students are fully and realistically informed of this exciting and expansive range of higher education and work opportunities that await them. (I was glad to see the Education Trust turn its focus to the important role that secondary school guidance counselors play as part of this larger process—their importance has been too-long ignored in high school reform.) And every Illinois high school must have a commitment to prepare each graduate to take on a meaningful role as a citizen in the global community.

But, neither am I yet convinced that the world will grind to a halt if every student doesn’t take Algebra II. Neither do I know if the cost-benefit analyses support
such a requirement—and investment for this discrete purpose—at the high school level. Yes, there is some transference of the logic and disciplined thinking required to pass the subject. But I sense the general public agrees with me on this—at least for now. As I meet and understand the work of talented welders, actors and artists, plumbers, airline attendants, farmers, lawyers, media and advertising people, bankers—and even some school teachers—I’m not sure I’m there yet.

But part of being an educated person is being open to pushing your thinking, learning new evidence and then changing your world view. As I come back from my travels these past two weeks, I am certain there will be no lacking of grist for the mill in terms of how all of us—at the federal, state and local levels—can revamp our mission, culture and work to respond to the global imperative for educational change and improvement.

Have a great week. Keep cool.

Randy Dunn

**Upcoming Deadlines**

- Special Education Pupil Excess Cost Reimbursement Claim - **August 1, 2006**
- Intent to Apply for Technology Immersion Pilot Project – **August 4, 2006**
- Class Size Reduction Pilot Program Grant Application – **August 4, 2006**
- Waiver applications to be considered by General Assembly in November – **August 11, 2006**
- Submissions to CeRTS to be processed before September – **August 14, 2006**
- Special Education Private Facility Reimbursement Claim - **August 15, 2006**
- Special Education Personnel Reimbursement Claim - **August 15, 2006**
- Regular/Vocational/Special Education Transportation Reimbursement Claim - **August 15, 2006**
- Rules Public Comment Deadline, Part 65 and Part 365 – **August 21, 2006**
- Rules Public Comment, Part 265– **September 5, 2006**
- Rules Public Comment Deadline, Special Education– **September 15, 2006**

**Early Childhood**

**Special Project RFP conference call set**

The Illinois State Board of Education Early Childhood Division has scheduled a conference call to provide information about two Early Childhood Special Projects Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that are posted on the Early Childhood site. Arrangements are as follows:

- Thursday, August 3
- 10 a.m. to noon
- Dial-in number: 1-866-297-6394
- Confirmation Number: 15318865

**Career and Technical Education**

**Illinois Agricultural Education trip to National FFA Convention to showcase program’s value**

Illinois agricultural education’s second annual one-day bus trip to the National FFA Convention is scheduled for Wednesday, October 25, 2006. Anyone with an interest in learning more about agricultural education, including Illinois teachers, guidance counselors, administrators, parents, board members and FFA Alumni members, are invited to see firsthand the impact FFA can have on students and school programs.

“Participants from last year’s trip were amazed at the tremendous educational value that the national convention provides. They realized the convention isn’t a field trip. It’s a fast-paced, constant-action learning event,” says Joe Webel, Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education (FCAE) special projects consultant and trip organizer.

This year’s convention will be held in Indianapolis, Ind. The bus trip features pick-up locations in all areas of the state, with points of departure determined by early registrations. Participants will have the opportunity to be part of the world’s largest youth convention and witness agricultural education in action. In addition to the opening session, participants will see the National FFA Career Show and get a window into Illinois’ agricultural education with information shared during the ride.

“I was in awe of the magnitude of the program, of the students involved and the high energy of the convention,” says Dan Carte, principal, Sangamon Valley High
School, Niantic, Ill. and 2005 participant. “Attending the convention was a phenomenal experience for me. I brought back tremendous enthusiasm and appreciation for our program and would recommend anyone that can attend go and learn what agricultural education can do for your school and for your students. The impact is immeasurable.”

Meals, registration and travel are complimentary. Copies of the flyer and registration form are available at http://www.isbe.net/career/pdf/FFA_convention.pdf. For additional information or to sign up, contact Mary Lawrence at 217-762-8283 or mlawrence@agricultureeducation.org.

English Language Learning

WAPT

The WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) known as the Screener, Version 2, is now available to Illinois public school districts serving English Language Learners to determine eligibility for ELL program/service placement. All copies of the previous W-APT™ should be destroyed and Version 2 should be used as its substitute.

Please note that students who score less that 4.0 on the W-APT screener are deemed eligible for Language Support Services (Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) or Transitional Program of Instruction (TPI).

School district administrators in charge of the district ELL services will need to use the login (the username and password) that ISBE Assessment Division sent to the superintendent and TBE/TPI program directors by US Mail in the fall of 2005. Superintendents and program administrators needing assistance with usernames and pass codes are instructed to call the Division of Assessment at 217-782-4823.

To get to the ACCESS For ELLs™ & W-APT™ Screener, go to http://www.wida.us. Look for the orange “Highlights” toolbar. To get additional navigational guidance to ACCESS For ELLs™ & W-APT™ go to: http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/htmls/access.htm or call Bill Garcia at 312-814-3850.

Illinois Advisory Council on Bilingual Education

Consistent with (105 ILCS 5/14C-13) (from Ch. 122, par. 14C-13), State Superintendent Randy Dunn is seeking individuals to serve on the Illinois Advisory Council on Bilingual Education. Terms consist of three years. Interested individuals should email their résumés to Robin M. Lisboa, at rlisboa@isbe.net by the close of business on August 21, 2006. Resume will be reviewed and recommendations will be made by the State Superintendent prior to September 1, 2006. For more information call the Division of English Language Learning at 312-814-3850.

Legislation

Legislative Update

Governor Blagojevich has acted upon additional legislation since the updated provided in the July 10 Weekly Message. Below you will find a summary of the legislation. To view the full text of a bill, access http://www.ilga.gov. On the left side of the page, type in the bill number [ex. HB 1463] (HB for a House Bill, SB for a Senate Bill) and click on “full text”. Be sure to look at the enrolled version to see the correct version of the bill signed into law. For additional information, contact Nicole Wills or Josh Jacobs in the Governmental Relations Division at 217-782-6510.

SB 859 (PA 94-0991)—In provisions concerning the suspension or revocation of a teaching certificate, the definition of unprofessional conduct is expanded to include the failure to disclose, on an employment application, any previous conviction for a sex offense as defined in Section 21-23a of the School Code or any other offense committed in any other state or against the laws of the United States that if committed in Illinois would be punishable as a sex offense.

SB 1497 (PA 94-1054)—From 7/1/06 through 06/30/08, provides that appropriated funds for the preschool grant program administered by ISBE shall be distributed to achieve a goal of "Preschool for All Children" for the benefit of all children whose families choose to participate in the program, with newly funded programs selected through a process giving first priority to qualified programs serving primarily at-risk children and second priority to qualified programs serving primarily children with a family income of less than 4 times certain poverty guidelines. Provides that at-risk children are those who because of their home and community environment are subject to such language, cultural, economic and like disadvantages to cause them to have been determined to be at risk of academic failure (now and after June 30, 2008, appropriated funds must be distributed for the benefit of children who because of their home and community environment are subject to such language, cultural, economic and like disadvantages that they have been determined to be at risk of academic failure). Makes changes to data reporting requirements. Effective 07/01/06.
SB 2795 (PA 94-1019) ISBE/Administration Initiative—Creates a new Article concerning the conversion and formation of school districts. Contains provisions concerning school district conversions; combined school district formation; unit school district formation; partial elementary unit school district formation; petitions; the holding of an election; taxes, bonds and working cash funds; the effective date of a change; a map showing the change; assets, liabilities, bonded indebtedness and tax rates; teachers in contractual continued service; limitations on contesting boundary changes; a limitation on successive petitions; a school district's non-recognition status; unit district formation and a joint agreement vocational education program; and incentives. Makes related changes in the School Code and Election Code.

SB 3016 (PA 94-0994)—Amends the Sex Offender Registration Act. P.A. 94-994 makes several changes to the sex offenders’ registration law [730 ILCS 150/3] and the information sex offenders must provide upon registration that is available to the public. Per P.A. 94-994, during school registration or parent-teacher conference days, a principal or teacher of any public or private elementary or secondary school shall advise parents of children attending that school that they may access information regarding registered sex offenders that is available to the public. This law is intended to increase awareness of the Illinois Sex Offender Registry (I-SOR) and to encourage parents to review the information available to them. ISBE suggests that school boards review this new law and advise their principals and teachers how best to notify parents of the I-SOR. The Illinois Sex Offender Registry is available through a link on the Illinois State Police website, at http://www.isp.state.il.us/. Individuals may search the database by name, zip code or county. Access is free. Link to P.A. 94-994: http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=094-0994andGA=094

Special Education

Guidance Documents available online

The ISBE Special Education Department has placed the following guidance documents online:

- Memorandum #06-3—Special Education Non-Public Proportionate Share Calculation and Home-Schooled Students, available online at: http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/pdfs/guidance_06-3.pdf

Professional Development

Free Workshops at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

Madame President

Offered in conjunction with the special temporary exhibit in the Illinois Gallery, this workshop will introduce teachers to the fascinating lives of some of our most memorable first ladies. Learn about their roles in the White House, their political interests and the triumphs and tragedies that befell these remarkable women. Lesson plans and classroom activities will also be presented. The workshop will include a tour of the new exhibit.

- Wednesday, August 9, 9-12 p.m. AND October 4, 3:30-6:30 p.m.
- Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
- Maximum Number of Attendees: 30 each day
- CPDUs/CEUs: 3 CPDU
- Fee: FREE
- Register via email: Carol.Manning@illinois.gov

Verse and Chorus: Lincoln

A unique professional development opportunity for educators, this workshop offered by “An Adventure of the American Mind” at Eastern Illinois University explores songs and poems from the digital collections of the Library of Congress inspired by the life and actions of Abraham Lincoln. This highly interactive workshop will focus on the use of primary source poetry and sheet music to deepen content understanding and improve student literacy. Modeled learning activities may be integrated into current curriculum or utilized to develop new materials for a variety of disciplines and grade levels.

- Thursday, August 10, 9 a.m. to noon or 1 to 4 p.m.
- Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
- Maximum Number of Attendees: 15 each day
- CPDUs/CEUs: three CPDUs
- Fee: FREE
- Register by July 31 at: http://www.eiu.edu/%7Eeiuaam/register/

ALPLM Teacher Orientation

This four-hour workshop will introduce educators to the resources available at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. Learn how to schedule a tour, how to prepare your class for their visit and methods for making the most of your school trip to the Museum. In addition, find out how to access digital resources from the Library collections, how to utilize the Library for research and other opportunities for professional development and classroom activities available through the ALPLM Education Department. The session will include a tour of the Museum.
Artifacts: Tangible, Touchable, Teachable Tools

Using artifacts in the classroom to explore stories from the past is an excellent way, not only to study history, but to improve oral language development which in turn can enhance students' reading and writing skills. In this hands-on session, participants will analyze reproduction artifacts, including objects, primary documents, images, political cartoons and more, to learn methods and criteria for selecting teachable primary sources for their classroom. Participants will learn how to analyze these materials and activities to utilize them across the curriculum.

- Wednesday, September 13, 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. or Saturday, September 16, 2006, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
- Maximum Number of Attendees: 30 each day
- CPDUs/CEUs: Four CPDUs
- Fee: FREE
- Register via email: Carol.Manning@illinois.gov

Political Cartoons in the Classroom

This two-hour workshop will introduce educators to using political cartoons to teach across the curriculum. Upon completion of this workshop, teachers will have a basic understanding of the history of political cartoons; identify the elements of cartoons (exaggeration, symbolism, labeling, irony and analogy); identify methods and techniques used by cartoonists to convey messages, including line, shading and form; interpret political cartoons to understand the cartoonist's point of view; identify online and print resources for finding political cartoons and have a clear plan for utilizing political cartoons in the classroom.

- Wednesday, November 8, 9-3 p.m.
- Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
- Maximum Number of Attendees: 30 each day
- CPDUs/CEUs: Five CPDUs
- Fee: FREE
- Register via email: Randy.Wiseman@illinois.gov

Student Opportunities

Hearst Foundation Senate Youth Program

In mid July each private and public high school principal received three copies of a brochure and application announcing the 45th Annual United States Senate Youth Program sponsored by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation. The two student winners of the competition representing Illinois will spend an all-expenses-paid, week-long educational experience in Washington, D.C., this spring. Each will also receive a $5,000 college scholarship. Please share this information with your guidance counselors, faculty and student government officers and encourage them to inform your talented juniors and seniors of this unique opportunity. The deadline for receiving student applications in this office is October 4, 2006. For further details, please visit our web page at the link below or call Dr. Richard Walker at 217/524-4832. Information is available online at: www.isbe.net/sos/htmls/hearst.htm

Classroom Resources

FDA launches consumer educational program on the safe use of OTC medicines

The US Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER), in cooperation with the National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) and Maryland’s Montgomery County Public Schools, has launched “Medicines in My Home,” an interactive educational program about the safe and effective use of over-the-counter medicines. The website provides classroom materials and resources for teachers and on-line information for students and their families.

The program emphasizes that medicines should be used only with permission from an adult and that if there are questions about medicine use, ask a pharmacist or doctor. Materials are provided to encourage students to share what they learn with their families so that all family members can learn to use over-the-counter medicines more safely. Information is available online at: www.fda.gov/medsinmyhome

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/060728.htm