September 17, 2008

Message from State Superintendent Christopher A. Koch

This past weekend brought us some of the wettest weather in years, continuing what has already been one of the wettest years recorded. In some areas of the state, annual rainfall is 20 inches above normal.

I know many of you and your communities are dealing with flood recovery right now and it is a very difficult time. State-sponsored programs can assist districts with building damage due to flooding under a couple of options; however, these options may not be available to districts in areas with tax caps unless those districts utilize a referendum.

The first program that may help is the Temporary Relocation Loan/Grant. Districts would have to provide the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) with any proceeds from insurance (which is used to offset the amount to be repaid) and would have to pledge to levy a 5-cent tax for a maximum of seven years or until the amount requested under the loan/grant is paid back. If the expenditures are greater than the total of the seven-year tax, then the amount that exceeds that tax and insurance proceeds would be considered a grant and would not need to be repaid.

Some of the eligible expenses under the Temporary Relocation Loan/Grant include lease/rental, renovation, salaries, transportation, utilities, architect’s and attorney’s fees and other expenses. You can find out more at http://www.isbe.net/construction/html/t_relo_details.htm or download an application at http://www.isbe.net/construction/pdf/F35-82_application_temporary_relocation.pdf.

Additionally, if a district has building violations due to flooding, tornadoes or other severe weather, then it can submit a health/life and safety (HLS) amendment to its Regional Superintendent and ISBE for approval after the district has consulted with an architect. Some examples of what could qualify under this option would be asbestos removal, wall damage/moisture, or structural damage. These amendments can be processed quickly through our new electronic HLS system on IWAS. If approved, then districts may then use the 5-cent tax levied under the HLS law or tax-backed bonding authority to pay for these repairs. More information on HLS can be accessed at http://www.isbe.net/construction/health_safety/default.htm.

School districts that close all schools districtwide due to flooding can utilize one of their five emergency days. When a district uses an emergency day, no student attendance is reported but the number of possible attendance days for that month is also reduced. Despite reducing the actual attendance days, the district is not penalized on its Average Daily Attendance calculations for General State Aid. If a district uses emergency days, then it must make up any of the days used before the end of the school year.

Also, a recent statutory change may provide some relief to districts if flooding has affected one or more recognized school buildings but not the entire district. P.A. 95-0811 allows districts to claim attendance due to an unforeseen school closure that occurs prior to instruction being provided. The new law
allows a district that has multiple recognized school buildings to claim a full day of attendance when one or more school buildings must be closed due to a condition beyond the district’s control (e.g., flooding) when the school is closed prior to providing any instruction. The district may claim student attendance for such building(s) for a maximum of two school days. The attendance claimed is based on the average of the three prior school days of student attendance immediately preceding the closure of the school building(s). (See P.A. 95-0811 at http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=095-0811&GA=095.)

In addition, the reason for closing one or more buildings must be certified in writing within a month of the closing by the school district superintendent to the Regional Superintendent of Schools and forwarded to the State Superintendent of Education for approval. District superintendents are advised to use the following form to document and provide a rationale for the school closures in their district: http://www.isbe.net/funding/pdf/50-65_interrupted_day.pdf.

Finally, Board members reviewed the results of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) today during their September meeting in Bloomington. The statewide average percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on all state tests increased slightly from 73.8% in 2007 to 74.8% in 2008. Overall student performance on the ISAT increased 78.7% in 2007 to 79.1% in 2008, while the average percentage of students meeting and exceeding standards on the PSAE stayed virtually unchanged from 52.6% in 2007 to 52.5% this year. Students with disabilities take the Illinois Alternate Assessment (IAA) if their participation in ISAT or the PSAE would not be appropriate. The state average on IAA increased from 59.1% to 66.3% in 2008.

Congratulations to all of you for your hard work preparing students for the tests, and best wishes to you with your flood recovery efforts.

Chris

**Upcoming Dates & Deadlines**

- **PSAE Grade 12 retake initial registration** – September 19
- **ISAT AYP Appeals** – September 26
- **Differentiated Accountability Proposal comments** – September 30
- **Head Start reimbursement deadline to submit revised claims** – September 30
- **NCLB Homeless Children & Youth Program data collection** – October 1
- **Annual Superintendents’ Conference online registration** – October 1
- **LEA Determinations district improvement plans** – October 1
- **PSAE AYP Appeals** – October 6
- **Annual Financial Reports** – October 15
- **Teacher Salary Study form on IWAS** – October 15
- **Fall Housing enrollment counts from SIS** – October 15
- **Capital Needs Assessment Survey** – October 17
- **Thomas Lay Burroughs award nominations** – October 17
- **Deadline for Public Comment on Proposed New Part 75 (Incentive Grants for Agricultural Science Teacher Education)** – October 20
- **Annual Superintendents’ Conference** – October 23 – 24
- **FY09 School Budget Form** – October 31
- **School District Budgets** – October 31
- **School District Library grant applications** – November 26
The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education issued the attached guidance in order to provide State educational agencies and local educational agencies with information about how OCR assesses the use of race in assigning students to schools. The purpose of this guidance is to ensure that students are assigned to elementary and secondary schools on a nondiscriminatory basis consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its implementing regulations at 34 C.F.R. Part 100.

We encourage you to share with your staff the information in the letter that is linked below.
To view the Title VI Assignment of Students Letter click here: [http://www.edpubs.org/lyris/8-29-08TitleVIAssignmentDearColleagueLtr.pdf](http://www.edpubs.org/lyris/8-29-08TitleVIAssignmentDearColleagueLtr.pdf).

No Child Left Behind

2008 NCLB Blue Ribbon Schools Named

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings named 320 schools as 2008 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon Schools. The award honors schools for helping students achieve at very high levels and for making significant progress in closing the achievement gap.

Schools are selected based on one of two criteria: (1) schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance to high levels on state tests; and (2) schools whose students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests or in the case of private schools in the top 10 percent of the nation on nationally normed tests.

Under NCLB, schools must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading (language arts) and mathematics. Each state - not the federal government - sets its own academic standards and benchmark goals.

The 2008-2009 Teacher Salary Study data form is now available on IWAS. The deadline for districts and other local agencies that hire teachers to complete and submit the form is Wednesday, October 15.

If you do not have a contract at this time because you are still in negotiations, click on the "No Contract" button and log off. You will be asked to submit your data again in January 2009. Please be sure to provide a copy of your salary schedule/policy and negotiated agreement, unless you have already done so in a prior year and they are still in effect. Send copies to: Illinois State Board of Education, Data Analysis and Progress Reporting, 100 North First Street, S-284, Springfield, Illinois 62777.

Questions about completing the Teacher Salary Study data form may be addressed to Dr. Richard Yong in the Data Analysis and Progress Reporting Division at 217-782-3950 or ryong@isbe.net.

2008-2009 Fall Housing Data Collection Change

New this year, Fall Housing enrollment counts will be based on data reported for individual students in the ISBE Student Information System (SIS). School-level counts will no longer be collected on the Fall Housing Report System in IWAS. Instead, ISBE will use SIS Enrollment and Exit dates to determine the counts. Therefore, it is essential for districts to enroll and exit students in a timely manner. Official 2008-2009 Fall Housing enrollment counts will be taken from SIS on Wednesday, October 15, at 4 p.m. CST. The counts will reflect students enrolled as of Tuesday, September 30.

Please see the ISBE website for information about enrolling and exiting students in SIS at: [http://www.isbe.net/sis/default.htm](http://www.isbe.net/sis/default.htm). Questions may be directed to the ISBE Help Desk at 217-558-3600.

Educator & School Development

New Principal Mentoring Program

Starting with the 2007-2008 school year, each new principal is to receive mentoring from a highly qualified, highly trained educational leader who has had at least three years experience as a principal per PA 94-1039.

To guarantee new principals receive the mentoring services needed, school districts should contract the services of a Mentoring Entity certified by the State
Board of Education. The Mentoring Entity should meet the new principal and school district’s needs.

For a complete list of Mentoring Entities and additional program information, visit the Illinois New Principal Mentoring website at: http://www.ilprincipalmentoring.org/.

For additional questions, contact Rashonda at rashonda@ilprincipals.org or call 217-525-1383.

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Special Education

**Educational Surrogate Parent Recruitment**

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is seeking parent advocates for students with disabilities as part of the Educational Surrogate Parent Program. This program is responsible for protecting the rights of students with disabilities whose parents are unavailable. ISBE is promoting the program, which is a federal mandate that relies on volunteers from the community.

The educational surrogate parent’s role is to represent the student and advocate for his/her special education services by participating in the referral, evaluation and IEP development process. Any adult can volunteer for this program, although it may be especially well suited for retired persons, college students and foster parents. All volunteers are expected to attend and complete training. A flat fee stipend of $50.00 is provided to offset personal expenses. Please share this information with individuals who may be interested in participating.

For more information about the educational surrogate parent program, applications, training calendars and registration forms, please go to: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/spec-ed/default.htm.

You may also contact Juana Burchell for program information at 217-782-5589 or jburchel@isbe.net; or Melisse Reynolds for training information at 630-889-7393 or mreynolds@sased.org.

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School Business Services

**Capital Needs Assessment Survey**

Public Act 93-0489 requires the State Board of Education and the Capital Development Board to file with the General Assembly a comprehensive assessment report of the capital needs of all school districts.

We are requesting all districts that have not already done so to complete and submit the Capital Needs Assessment Survey by **Friday, October 17**. Full participation in this needs assessment will help ensure an accurate portrayal of the capital needs of all districts throughout the state.

A copy of the Capital Needs Assessment Survey, along with a cover letter, were e-mailed to all district and regional superintendents on **Friday, September 5**. If you did not receive this information, please let us know.

Additional forms, if needed, can be accessed on the following websites: www.isbe.net/finance or www.cdb.state.il.us.

Completed forms can be mailed to the Illinois State Board of Education, School Business Services, 100 North First Street, Springfield, Illinois 62777-0001 or by e-mail to finance@isbe.net.

Additional questions can be directed to Christine Kolaz in School Business Services at 217-785-8779.

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**Reorganization Feasibility Studies**

Funding is now available for FY 2009 School District Reorganization Feasibility Studies. Feasibility studies are a tool to be used by school districts wanting to investigate the advantages and/or disadvantages of reorganization options. Interested school districts should submit a proposed agreement with an independent contractor(s) to their Regional Office of Education (ROE). The ROE will submit the agreement to the State Board of Education (ISBE) for approval.

Each study will be funded on a base tier according to the number of school districts involved in the study. Studies will be funded an additional tier based on the combined enrollment of the districts involved. Studies are funded between $4,500 and $8,000 based on the above procedure, and funds are available on a “first come – first served” basis.

In order to receive reorganization feasibility study funds in FY 2009, agreements must be approved by the ROE and ISBE, and studies must be completed and approved for payment no later than **June 30, 2009**. Procedures, funding allotment, and sample forms are available at: www.isbe.net/sfms/html/feasibility.htm.
For questions contact Michelle Heninger, School Business Services, at 217-785-8779 or e-mail mheninge@isbe.net.

Grants & Programs

NCLB Homeless Children and Youth Program Data Collection

Each year school districts are mandated by the Title X, Part C McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act to report information on homeless children and youth using the State Board of Education’s IWAS reporting system. The submission date for FY08 data is Wednesday, October 1.

The report to be completed is the NCLB Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program. The purpose of this report is to gather data and update homeless liaison information in the current database for the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. Report information can be accessed back to the 2005 school year for data comparison by the school district.

Directions for completing the report can be found at: http://www.isbe.net/homeless/pdf/homeless_ed_yth_rpt.pdf.

For technical assistance, contact Peggy Dunn, Grants and Programs Division, 217/524-4832 or madunn@isbe.net.

Curriculum & Instruction

IDNR Offerings for Students

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is offering the following learning opportunities to students:

Prying into Prions: Investigating Chronic Wasting Disease: High school students will explore prion diseases, including chronic wasting disease affecting Illinois’ white-tailed deer. Students will examine the role of proteins in organisms, the chemistry and properties of proteins, the genetic processes that create proteins, and how proteins can become pathogenic. The program is available to all Illinois high school teachers. Requests can be made in writing on school letterhead to IDNR Division of Education, One Natural Resource Way, Springfield, IL 62702.

Biodiversity Squirrel Study: Teachers and students in grades K-12 have an opportunity to participate in a statewide, year-long study of Illinois tree squirrels. Students will collect data through a secure online site, analyze the results and discuss them with scientists and other students statewide. To join, visit: http://collaboratory.nunet.net and click “Participate.” On the next page, select “Request New Account.” Once the account is approved, teachers and students can help IDNR monitor Illinois squirrels.

New Resource Trunks Available: Aquatic Illinois and Illinois Birds have joined the popular resource trunk series on loan from IDNR. Several new lending locations recently have been added for the seven topics now available. For a complete list of lending locations and their contact information go to: http://dnr.state.il.us/lands/education/CLASSRM/teach.htm.

Natural Illinois Learning Series

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Division of Education and the Illinois Early Learning Project of the University of Illinois have produced a series of tip sheets on “Natural Illinois.”

The first edition in the series, “Insects,” is now available at: http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tipsheets/insects.htm. The Spanish-language version will be added soon. The next two tip sheets will be on “Trees” and “Leaves,” with other topics following in coming months.

The Illinois State Board of Education has funded the Illinois Early Learning Project to select and create high-quality resources that respond to the early learning information needs of parents and educators in Illinois.

2008 History Teacher of the Year Named

Congratulations to the 2008 Illinois History Teacher of the Year, Cynthia Lightle, from Griggsville-Perry CUSD #4 in Griggsville. Cynthia will be presented a certificate and a check at the Illinois Council for the Social Studies Fall Conference in Lisle, Illinois, on October 3rd. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History sponsors the contest across the country every year.

Nutrition

Whole-Grain Products Pilot Project
The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is encouraging greater awareness of and interest in the number and variety of whole-grain products available to schoolchildren. To help meet this goal, FNS is providing whole-grain USDA commodities in addition to the commodities currently provided in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) during school year 2009.

While actual products and quantities will depend on availability, Illinois expects to receive whole-grain, frozen pancakes and whole-grain tortillas. We anticipate these two whole-grain products will be available for distribution to schools during March and April 2009. These products will not count against your school’s entitlement.

The Farm Bill also requires an evaluation of this pilot project, which will be conducted by the Institute for Obesity Research and Program Evaluation at Texas A&M University. Schools that receive these whole-grain products may enroll in this evaluation and may be required to submit information, such as student acceptability and general product feedback. The goal of this pilot is to determine whether children participating in the NSLP increased their consumption of whole grains, and which whole grains were most acceptable for use in the NSLP.

If you wish to participate in the pilot, login to the Illinois Commodity System (ICS). To place an order for these products select Annual Order Forms from the main menu and then select Annual Order Form. Next click on the Bonus tab on the Group B—All form.

Again, actual quantities will depend on availability. If you have questions about the pilot project, contact Jim Copp at 217-782-2491 or e-mail jcopp@isbe.net.

**Hand Washing Poster Requirements**

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) would like to clarify that in Illinois food service establishments are not required to post hand washing signs. This message comes in response to letters the State Board’s Nutrition Program Division has received from schools that have been contacted by a company trying to sell them posters.

Food service establishments may use their own hand washing signs or obtain them for free from their local health department or the IDPH, Division of Food, Drugs and Dairies. For questions on the poster requirements, call Jayne Nosari at IDPH at 217-785-2439.

**Funding & Disbursements**

**Updated Special Education Personnel Approval & Reimbursement FAQs**


The Home/Hospital Questions and Answers document, formerly a separate item, has been included as an individual section at the end of the FAQ document.

Special education personnel approval questions can be directed to Sharon Conrath at sconrath@isbe.net. Special education personnel reimbursement questions can be directed to Judy Conboy at jconboy@isbe.net. Sharon and Judy can also be reached at 217-782-5256.

**New Pupil Transportation FAQs**

A new Pupil Transportation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) guidance document has been created and can be accessed at: http://www.isbe.net/funding/pdf/pupil_transp_faq.pdf.

The new document covers a broad range of pupil transportation issues including district requirements to provide free transportation, transporting students with disabilities, serious safety hazard requirements, the appropriate use and concerns of 11-15 passenger vans and questions that pertain to claim reimbursement.

Program and technical issues pertaining to pupil transportation can be directed to Cinda Meneghetti at cmeneghe@isbe.net. Claim reimbursement issues pertaining to pupil transportation can be directed to Jamie Johnson at jjohnson@isbe.net. Cinda and Jamie can also be reached at 217-782-5256.

**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: