The last week in October can only mean two things—Halloween and Report Cards. I want to remind you that it is your responsibility to ensure that your school and district report cards are publicly released by this Friday.

The Illinois State Board of Education will release the school, district and state report cards online Friday morning. We have provided information to the media on an embargoed basis so you will likely see and hear stories generated from the report card on that date, or representatives of the media may call you this week asking you about this information.

We hosted the Annual Superintendents’ Conference last week in Springfield at the Crowne Plaza Hotel and I want to thank all of you who attended. We received a lot of positive feedback on the location and are looking for dates to host it at the Crowne Plaza again next year. I want to thank Susie Morrison, Leigh Ann Smith, and Don Evans for working so hard to set up the conference and I also want to thank all of the presenters for their wonderful work.

Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, closed the conference with an exceptional presentation comparing student performance both nationally and internationally. She dispelled many myths about low-performing schools and provided many examples of high-poverty, high-performing schools and districts. Among the advice in her message about what educators can do: 1) focus on what students can do versus what they can't; 2) create professional learning organizations where teachers are supported in the work of teaching (Education Trust recommends a minimum of eight observations of teachers in the classroom during the school year); and 3) maintain high standards through meaningful course completion and assignments, awarding grades that accurately reflect a student’s performance.

Increasing student performance through high expectations was an important theme of the presenters at this year’s conference. For every challenge that struggling districts and schools have encountered, there are similar, if not identical challenges, faced in other districts that have overcome those problems and managed to demonstrate academic growth. Educators have no excuses if they expect less of our students, teachers and administrators. For example, if we were to sit down and review the high school transcripts of our high school students from our lower performing or high-poverty schools, would we be proud of the courses they took and their level of preparedness for college and the work force?

The members of the State Board are currently putting together their budget request and I wanted to take this time to talk to you about the overall budget situation. As you know, we have seen increases in education spending for a number of consecutive years; however, the problems with the economy are now being felt on the state level.

According to the State Comptroller’s Office, it currently has $2 billion more in bills than it has the ability to pay. The Comptroller is paying bills about 50 business days after it receives them, indicating that the office has never been this far behind in paying bills this early in a fiscal year.
The Comptroller’s Office makes the payment of General State Aid a priority; however, mandated categoricals, grants and other debts are paid as funding allows and as other priorities are met. This means that the payment of these bills will be delayed until the state’s revenues catch up to its bills.

A bright spot in this situation is that the General State Aid payment cycle has been changed this year from 24 to 22 payments, which means all General State Aid for this fiscal year will be paid during this fiscal year. This new cycle ends the speculation of whether or not the 23rd and 24th payments will be advanced.

Happy Halloween and thank you for ensuring that report cards are made public by October 31.

Chris

Upcoming Dates & Deadlines

- SGSA Expenditure Plans due in IWAS – October 30
- Arts Education Week Poster Contest Entries – October 31
- School District Budgets – October 31
- 2008 Special Education Summer School State Aid Claim – November 3
- 2008 Special Education Summer Orphanage Claim – November 3
- 2007-08 Regular/Vocational/Special Education Transportation Claim Corrections – November 7
- Pupil Transportation Reimbursement Correction Period ends – November 7
- Limitation of Administrative Costs Worksheet Section 17-1.5 – November 14
- Health and Immunization Data due in IWAS – November 15
- Part 130, Part 235, Part 245 and Part 525: Public comment ends – November 17
- School District Library grant applications – November 26
- NCLB Monitoring Instrument & NCLB Title I Comparability submissions – November 30
- Looking for Your Lincoln Hero submissions – December 1
- Waiver applications to be considered by the General Assembly during Spring 2009 session – January 9

E-Bulletins

Parental Involvement & Notification Requirements Posted

Two new E-Bulletins have been posted on the ISBE website. These bulletins cover “parent involvement policies” and “parent involvement notification requirements” under NCLB.

E-Bulletins contain guidance and technical assistance for districts to meet the requirements of NCLB. If you have a suggestion for an E-Bulletin topic, please e-mail it to NCLB@isbe.net.

To access E-Bulletins, go to ISBE’s website at: http://www.isbe.net/e-bulletins/default.htm.

English Language Learning

ACCESS for ELLs™ Update

Ordering Test Materials & ID Labels
Local districts must order test materials and ID labels for ACCESS for ELLs™, the annual state English language proficiency assessment, from MetriTech by calling 800-747-4868 by Friday, November 14.

The ACCESS for ELLs™ test will be administered from January 12 through February 20, 2009. Additional details, including information on the Friday, October 31, deadline to apply for a testing window waiver, are available at http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/htmls/access.htm.
For questions regarding the ordering of ACCESS for ELLs™ test materials, contact the Student Assessment Division at 217-782-4823.

**Kindergarten Administrator Recertification**
The 2009 Kindergarten ACCESS for ELLs™ test will be using a new format. Therefore, all kindergarten test administrators are required to be recertified prior to administering the 2009 test by completing an on-line WIDA training. All kindergarten recertification testing must have taken place after **September 30, 2008**, for a teacher to be considered certified to administer the Kindergarten ACCESS for ELLs™. Any kindergarten on-line certification completed prior to **September 30, 2008**, will not be valid.

In order to facilitate this process, WIDA is planning a series of kindergarten assessment web-based trainings in November and December 2008 that will incorporate live Q&A sessions. More information about these trainings will be provided as soon as it becomes available to ISBE. Contact the WIDA Help Desk toll free at 1-866-276-7735 or e-mail help@wida.us with questions or concerns.

**Pre-K- Kindergarten Screening**
Please note that schools will continue to use the current kindergarten W-APT screener during the 2008-2009 school year. MODEL, the newly updated kindergarten screener, will not be used in Illinois until the 2009-2010 school year. However, districts may begin using MODEL in spring 2009 to determine FY10 program eligibility for students newly entering Pre-K/Kindergarten.

**ACCESS for ELLs™ General Training**
Additional face-to-face ACCESS for ELLs™ training workshops will be offered for teachers and administrators on **Wednesday, December 3, and Thursday, December 4**. These workshops will focus on test organization, background/structure of test components, understanding, and accurately scoring the speaking test component. These professional development workshops are supplemental and do not replace any on-line certification training.

**December 3, 2008**
Elgin Community College
Seigle Auditorium
1700 Spartan Drive
Elgin, Illinois 60123

847-931-3925

**December 4, 2008**
Heartland Community College
1500 W. Raab Road
Normal, Illinois 61761
309-268-8000

For further information on the ACCESS for ELLs™ workshops, contact Bill Garcia at 312-814-3850 or go to [http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/htmls/access.htm](http://www.isbe.net/bilingual/htmls/access.htm).

**Funding & Disbursements**

**Final Rule on School Bus Seat Belts**

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters announced on **Wednesday, October 15**, a new federal rule on school bus seat belts. The full text of Secretary Peter’s announcement can be found at [http://www.dot.gov/affairs/dot15208.htm](http://www.dot.gov/affairs/dot15208.htm).

The full text of the final rule can be found at [http://www.isbe.net/funding/pdf/E8-24755.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/funding/pdf/E8-24755.pdf)

In summary, the final rule from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Department of Transportation (DOT) upgrades the school bus passenger crash protection requirements of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 222. This final rule requires new school buses of 10,000 pounds or less gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) (“small school buses”) to have lap/shoulder belts in lieu of the lap belts currently required. This final rule also sets performance standards for seat belts voluntarily installed on school buses with a GVWR greater than 10,000 pounds (“large school buses”).

In regard to requiring seat belts on large school buses, it is important to note that the final rule states, “This cannot and does not definitively conclude the debate as to whether a state or local jurisdiction should require seat belts on its large school buses.” Further, “After considering all available information, including the comments to the notice of proposed rulemaking, we cannot conclude that a requirement for seat belts on large school buses will protect against an unreasonable risk of accidents or an unreasonable risk of death or injury in an accident. That is, based on available information, a science-based, data-driven determination that there should be a federal requirement for the belts cannot be supported at this time. Whether the same conclusion can be made by a
state or local jurisdiction is a matter for local decision-makers and we encourage them to make the decisions most appropriate for their individual needs to most safely transport their students to and from school.”

Other changes to school bus safety requirements include raising the height of seat backs from 20 to 24 inches on all new school buses and requiring a self-latching mechanism on seat bottom cushions that are designed to flip up or be removable without tools. Currently, Illinois already meets the seat back requirement as all large school buses (i.e. GVWR greater than 10,000 pounds) in the state manufactured after June 30, 1987, must have 28 inch seat backs.

The effective date of this final rule is April 20, 2009. The requirement for lap/shoulder belts on small school buses applies to small school buses manufactured on or after October 21, 2011. Likewise, the requirement that voluntarily-installed seat belts in large school buses must meet the performance and other requirements specified by this final rule applies to large school buses manufactured on or after October 21, 2011. The requirement for the 24-inch seat backs and the self-latching seat bottom cushions apply to school buses manufactured on or after October 21, 2009.

Lincoln Bicentennial

Looking for Your Lincoln Hero Contest

Those interested in writing about a Lincoln-like hero they admire are encouraged to enter the Looking for Your Lincoln Hero contest. Participants should tell why this person inspires them in an online essay or they can also create a piece of artwork to illustrate how their hero is like Lincoln.

Essay and artwork categories include elementary, middle or high school students, college and graduate students and adults and professionals.

The entry deadline is Monday, December 1. For complete details on the contest, go to www.MyHero.com and click on “Looking for the Lincoln of Today.”

The contest is sponsored by Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition and the My Hero Project.

Curriculum & Instruction

Picturing America Application Deadline Extended to November 14

The National Endowment for the Humanities has extended the deadline to apply for “Picturing America” through Friday, November 14. The extension will allow additional schools, libraries and school and library districts to apply for this free resource that offers educators a way to teach American history and other subjects through great American art.

“Picturing America” includes 40 laminated large, high-quality reproductions of significant American art and a comprehensive teachers’ resource book with lesson ideas to use with the images in K-12 grade levels and subject areas.

Schools and libraries may apply for the program in a simple, online application process at: http://picturingamerica.neh.gov/about.php?subPage=about_apply.

School and library districts may also apply for every institution in their jurisdiction with one, single application.

Blue Apple Health Education Awards

The American Association for Health Education (AAHE) and HealthTeacher are announcing a partnership to bestow students in grades K-12 with the Blue Apple Health Education Awards. The new health education award will recognize up to 12 U.S. schools for their commitment and creativity in teaching students about the power of practicing a healthy lifestyle.

Schools receiving the Blue Apple Health Education Award will be honored during AAHE’s national convention in Tampa, Florida, in April 2009. Award recipients will receive:

- Recognition award and flag denoting their school as a Blue Apple recipient.
- AAHPERD/AAHE convention registration and travel stipend.
- Inclusion in national and local public relations campaign highlighting Blue Apple recipients.
- Free one-year subscription to HealthTeacher, a comprehensive online health education curriculum.
Applications for the Blue Apple Awards will be available beginning this month and must be received by **Friday, December 12**. For an application and more information about Blue Apple Awards go to [www.blueappleaward.org](http://www.blueappleaward.org).

**Art & Foreign Language Grants**

Through a joint initiative, the State Board of Education and the Illinois Arts Council are providing grants to public school districts and other eligible applicants to support arts and foreign language programs in Illinois schools.

Two separate Requests for Proposal (RFP) have been released. The Arts and Foreign Language Planning Assistance Grant provides financial support for districts during their planning phase. A separate Arts and Foreign Language Implementation Assistance Grant is available to support school efforts to implement new programs. Both RFPs are available under the “What’s New” section of the Curriculum & Instruction webpage located at [http://www.isbe.net/curriculum/Default.htm](http://www.isbe.net/curriculum/Default.htm).

School districts interested in applying for either grant should submit a letter of intent to ISBE by **Thursday, November 6**. Grant proposals are due on **Monday, November 24**.

Questions regarding the grants may be e-mailed to Ann Nonneman at annonema@isbe.net.

**Legal**

**Notice of Final Interpretations**

On **Friday, October 17**, the U.S. Department of Education published a Notice of Final Interpretations pertaining to state implementation of several assessment and accountability provisions of Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.


For further information, please contact Richard Smith at 202-401-1402.

**Retired Teachers Update**

Public Act 95-0910, effective **August 28, 2008**, extends the sunset date of the current “subject shortage provision” which allows retired teachers to return to certain TRS employers in limited situations. The sunset date has been extended to **June 30, 2013**. Generally speaking, TRS annuitants may be employed in a TRS-covered position for a limited number of days/hours the school year following the year in which they last contributed to TRS.

Currently this limitation is 120 paid days or 600 paid hours and will revert to 100 paid days or 500 paid hours on **July 1, 2011** (unless extended by legislation). A TRS annuitant can return to work in a “subject shortage area” in limited circumstances which are fully described in the TRS Employer Guide, Chapter 10: [http://trs.illinois.gov/subsections/employers/pubs/employerguide/10PostRet.pdf](http://trs.illinois.gov/subsections/employers/pubs/employerguide/10PostRet.pdf)

For questions, TRS Employer Services can be contacted by e-mail at employer@trs.illinois.gov or call 888-877-0890.

**Report Cards and Transcripts for Students with Disabilities**

The Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education issued the attached guidance in order to provide state education agencies and local education agencies with information regarding disclosure of a disability on report cards and transcripts for students attending public elementary and secondary schools. The purpose of this guidance is to clarify how federal laws apply to statements on report cards and transcripts when these statements identify students with disabilities. We encourage you to share with your staff the information in this letter.

Select [this link](http://www.isbe.net/curriculum/Default.htm) for the Dear Colleague Letter on Report Cards and Transcripts for Students with Disabilities.

**Nutrition**

**Recognizing Illinois School Breakfast Week**

During the week of **November 17 - 21**, ISBE invites schools across the state to recognize Illinois School Breakfast Week. The event is celebrated in conjunction with American Education Week, and it highlights the
important relationship between breakfast consumption and positive academic performance. National School Breakfast Week is March 2-6, 2009.

For more information on School Breakfast Week, go to www.isbe.net/nutrition.

For information on American Education Week, go to http://www.nea.org/aew/index.html.

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**Nutrition Grants Available**

Is a garden in your school’s future? If so, apply for the Youth Gardening Grant, which is due Saturday, November 1. Visit www.kidsgardening.com/ygg.asp for an application.

Encouraging veggie consumption in an elementary school? Let a Love Your Veggies grant assist you. Visit http://loveyourveggiesgrants.org/_apply.php for an application, which is due by Friday, November 7.

Do you serve breakfast at school in a nontraditional way? If so, the Midwest Dairy Council and St. Louis District Dairy Council invite schools K through 12 to apply for the 2008 Expanding Breakfast Award at www.midwestdairycouncil.com or www.stldairycouncil.org/home.asp by Friday, November 14.

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**Grants & Programs**

**John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Essay Contest**

The John F. Kennedy Library Foundation has announced that the national Profile in Courage Essay Contest is accepting entries from U.S. high school students through Saturday, January 10, 2009.

The annual essay contest, a companion program of the Profile in Courage Award, invites students from across the nation to write an essay describing the political courage of a U.S. elected official.

The winner of this competitive award receives a $5,000 cash prize. The student’s nominating teacher receives a $500 public service grant to be used for school projects involving student leadership and civic engagement. A second place winner receives $1,000 and up to five finalists each receive $500. The essay contest winner and nominating teacher will also receive an expense paid round-trip to Boston, where they will be honored by Caroline Kennedy and U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy at the annual John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award ceremony in May 2009.

More detailed information about the essay contact is available at the John F. Kennedy Library Foundation website www.jfklibrary.org.

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**Awards & Grants**

**THINKFINITY Offers Free Internet Resources**

Thinkfinity is the cornerstone of the Verizon Foundation’s Literacy, Education and Technology Initiatives. It is a free internet resource. There is no need to register or log on and never any fees to pay. This program is built upon the merger of two highly acclaimed programs – Marco Polo and the Thinkfinity Literacy Network.
Thinkfinity is designed to improve learning in traditional settings and beyond the classroom by providing high-caliber content with over 55,000 lesson plans, learning activities, worksheets and rubrics and the professional development needed to use the resources to improve student achievement anytime, anywhere, at no cost. To find out more about this resource go to www.thinkfinity.org.

Free in-service workshops on how to bring these Internet resources into the classroom are available to local schools, pre-service teachers and community service organizations. We are also looking for dedicated educators to become field trainers. These field trainers will train other teachers in the use of this new resource.

For more information, contact Debbie Potts, Thinkfinity state coordinator, Illinois Office of Educational Services, at dpotts@ioes.org or at 800-252-4822, ext. 233.

Use Donors Choose.org for Free Classroom Materials

DonorsChoose.org is a simple way to provide students in need with resources that our public schools often lack. Teachers can submit project proposals for materials or experiences their students need to learn at this not-for-profit web site. These ideas become classroom reality when concerned individuals, whom we call Citizen Philanthropists, choose projects to fund.

Proposals can range from "Magical Math Centers" to "Big Book Bonanza," to "Cooking Across the Curriculum." Any individual can search such proposals by area of interest, learn about classroom needs, and choose to fund the project(s) they find most interesting.

To take advantage of this grant opportunity, go to www.DonorsChoose.org and submit a project. DonorsChoose.org can be used by any public school teacher to help secure free materials for the classroom to help students learn.

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.