TO: Illinois State Board of Education
FROM: Robert E. Schiller, Superintendent
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Agenda Topic: 2002 Statewide Student Achievement Data

Materials: 2002 Statewide Student Achievement Data Summary
Assessment and Accountability Task Force Work Plan

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Purpose of Agenda Item

To review the recently released student achievement data acquired from statewide testing in the spring of 2002 and to delineate policy issues related to the data analysis.

Expected Outcomes of Agenda Item

- Board members will gain knowledge and comfort levels with the achievement data.
- Board will identify and discuss policy implications of the data.

Background Information

Statewide scores for the 2002 administration of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) were released to the public on July 31, 2002. This year marked the 4th consecutive ISAT administration and the 2nd administration for the PSAE.

Statewide test scores are released prior to the publication of individual school district scores, which is done at the discretion of the districts. Individual students also receive score reports for each test they take.

State testing has taken on ever-greater importance with the advent of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, with its highly specific accountability requirements for student testing and progress. State assessment and accountability issues will be addressed by a Task Force convened by the Superintendent and co-
chaired by ISBE General Counsel Respicio Vazquez and Bloomington District 87 Superintendent Robert Nielson. Task Force objectives include recommendations for improving the state tests and for unifying state and federal accountability systems (as required by NCLB by May of 2003.)

Task Force recommendations will inform both the Board’s spring legislative agenda and specifications for future testing contracts.

An overarching goal for the coming year is to build consensus and support for both the state testing program and its logical integration into the educational accountability system.

Analysis

ISAT Data 1999 through 2002

- There is clearly an upward trend in the mathematics achievement of Illinois students. The percent meeting and exceeding state standards increased consistently at each grade level since 1999. Grade 8 improved by nearly 10 percentage points over the four assessment periods.

- There is also an upward trend in the science achievement of Illinois students. The increase in the percent meeting and exceeding state standards, though not equal in magnitude to the achievement in mathematics, is nonetheless consistent across all grades since 2000.

- Achievement in reading, writing, and social science has remained relatively stable since ISAT was first administered.

- In Grade 5 writing, however, there was a decline in the percent meeting and exceeding state standards since 1999. This trend, coupled with the unusual drop of eleven percentage points in 2002, calls for further analysis and a thorough investigation.

ISAT Achievement Gaps

- Substantial gaps are evident in achievement for low-income students compared to non-low-income students. Gaps are also evident between minority groups and white students. There is a consistent pattern of the gaps across all subjects and grades.

- In 2002, minority and low-income students improved their scores in most subjects and grades tested, though wide gaps are still evident. But in Grade 5 writing, the scores fell in 2002 for all student groups which, as mentioned earlier, calls for further investigation.

- Overall, Illinois has a long way to go to meet the 12-year NCLB target of all students in all groups meeting or exceeding standards in reading and mathematics.
ISAT – Illinois Compared to the Nation

- Compared to the nation as a whole, Illinois is performing better in both reading and mathematics. Comparison is done in terms of “national quarters.” Thus, if Illinois mirrored the nation, there would be 50% of the scores in the combined third (25%) and fourth quarters (25%). (Note: first quarter = lowest, fourth quarter = highest)

- The Illinois distribution in the third and fourth quarters for both reading and mathematics exceed 50%. In reading, there were at least 54% in the third and fourth quarters in the last two years. In mathematics, there were at least 63% in the third and fourth quarters in the last two years. These percentages compare favorably with 50% in the top two quarters for the nation.

PSAE – Illinois Data 2001 to 2002

- Performance on the PSAE has remained stable for all subject areas (reading, mathematics, writing, and social science), except science improved by 2.5 percentage points in the combined meets and exceeds categories.

- Differences in performance in areas other than science are due to random statistical bounce.

PSAE – Achievement Gaps

- Data disaggregated by the various student groups further show that PSAE performance remained fairly stable in four of the five subject areas (reading, mathematics, writing, and social science), and performance in science improved in all student groups.

- Significant gaps remain between white and minority student groups, as well as between low-income and non-low-income student groups.

Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications

Policy Implications

Student performance levels, as measured by the state tests, are either flat or rising very slowly. Many students are not achieving expectations established by the Illinois Learning Standards, especially in minority and low-income student groups.

At these rates of performance and improvement, Illinois schools will have great difficulty in meeting the 12-year NCLB goal of all students meeting standards. While achievement gaps are closing slightly for some minority groups, overall performance for too many students is still far below “proficiency.”

The State Board and staff are looking at ways to accelerate the pace of effective assistance to those schools with the most students not meeting standards; this “system
of support” will leverage research, funding and expertise in ways that should maximize results. However, many other schools have groups of students who struggle. Targeted, effective assistance and efficiencies of scale are issues still to be addressed.

Reading at the early grades must remain a policy priority of the Board as it has been for the past several years. Flat achievement over four years, with 30-40% of students not meeting reading standards at their grade levels is not tolerable. Obviously, new and more effective approaches must be put in place. Getting serious about effective reading instruction will be a primary focus of Superintendent Schiller’s administration.

Student access to strong teachers and rich curriculum remain primary concerns. As ACT data from past studies has shown, Illinois minority students rank low in the nation in terms of taking and passing a “core” college-preparatory curriculum. In order to provide these courses, many more highly qualified teachers will be needed, and some serious attention given to the structure and organization of the high school. The Illinois Virtual High School has opened the door to advanced curriculum for some students, especially for those in districts whose enrollments cannot support full-time staff for all subjects.

Building consensus and support for the testing program and the accountability system is an overarching goal for the coming year. As accountability consequences accelerate, many questions arise regarding the instruments used to judge; namely, the ISAT, Prairie State, IMAGE and Alternative Assessment tests. The State Board has responsibility for unifying accountability requirements for all schools by May of 2003.

**Future policy discussions based on additional data analyses**

Additional analysis will look at the core curriculum information provide by ACT for 2002, disaggregating by race and low income status. One hypothesis is that achievement gaps at the high school level can be at least partially explained by early and continued “tracking” of students into classes that are “low and slow.” These types of local policies may persist in those schools that have not adjusted to standards-led reforms; programs that provide the minimum in content and rigor may keep students in school, but will not equip them to succeed in their post-secondary endeavors.

Another in-depth analysis will look at the participation and scores of students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). As with other student groups, their achievement levels must continue to rise over time. With chronic teacher shortages in special education, and more demands being placed on those entering the field, this will be an important policy arena for several years to come.

Studies of our high-performing, high-poverty schools will continue, beginning with a report the Board received in June 2002. Discovering how to reproduce similar successes in other schools will be integral to building a successful system of support.
Budget Implications

Costs for continuation and improvements to the state testing program will continue to escalate over time. Adding the additional grade levels required by NCLB and returning more detailed and useful test data will add significantly to the current cost of about $20 million annually. Contracts are scheduled to be re-bid in the winter of 2002-03. By packaging most, if not all, testing services into a single multi-year Request for Proposals, ISBE staff hopes to attract bidders who can offer first-quality products and services at the best possible prices.

Legislative Action

The Superintendent’s Task Force will provide recommendations that will guide the development of legislative proposals in the Spring session of 2002. These will include the mandatory testing elements of NCLB, as well as related accountability requirements.

Legislators serving on the Task Force will be asked to work with General Assembly colleagues to promote understanding and support for the Task Force recommendations and related legislative proposals.

Communications

ISBE Public Information staff will build on the statewide data release of July 31, 2002. Additional analyses of the test data will be released publically and posted on ISBE’s website. Future Board meeting discussions will provide opportunities for media interactions as well as communications to school districts.

The Superintendent’s Task Force will be making recommendations for a broad public engagement effort leading up to and including the spring 2003 session of the General Assembly.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

The Superintendent recommends that the State Board place a standing item for Assessment/Accountability on the Board agenda for the remaining months of 2002. Upcoming reports will include the additional analyses of test data as described in this month’s materials, as well as updates on the progress of the Task Force.

The Superintendent further recommends that the Board commit to developing appropriate legislative proposals based on the Task Force recommendations and the public feedback they generate.
**Next Steps**

- Staff will undertake additional analyses of test data for future reports and policy guidance.
- The Superintendent will convene the Assessment and Accountability Task Force according to the schedule shared at this month’s Board meeting.
- The Superintendent will work with the Board and stakeholders to develop a consensus for legislative action as needed in the Spring 2002 session of the General Assembly.