ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
September 18-19, 2002

TO: Illinois State Board of Education

FROM: Robert E. Schiller, Superintendent
       Lynne Haeffele Curry, Director

Agenda Topic: Illinois Learning Standards Four
              Year Evaluation Report

Materials: Year Four Report (Under Separate Cover)
          Summary of Findings and Recommendations
          “Sampler” of ISBE Implementation Support

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Purpose of Agenda Item
To report the findings and recommendations of the longitudinal evaluation of
implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item
• Board Members will gain an understanding of the status of the implementation of
  the Illinois Learning Standards.
• Board Members will identify and discuss policy implications.

Background Information
In July 1997, the Illinois State Board of Education adopted the Illinois Learning
Standards (ILS). The Illinois Learning Standards address the six fundamental learning
areas set forth in Section 27-1 of the School Code (105 ILCS 5/2701): English and
language arts, mathematics, science, social science, physical development and health,
and the fine arts. In addition, the learning standards include advisory standards that
address foreign languages.

In January 1999, the Illinois State Board of Education, through an RFP process, entered
into a four-year contract with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to assess
the extent to which local districts are implementing the Illinois Learning Standards; and
to identify factors which enhance or inhibit implementation, and to investigate the
relationship between ILS implementation and student achievement. The first fiscal year
of operation ended on June 30, 1999, and the report that was completed in August 2002 covers the fourth year of the study.

The principal investigators, Drs. Lizanne DeStefano and Nona Prestine, used a five-level implementation scale to determine the extent and nature of the implementation of the ILS:

* Level 1: Becoming aware of the ILS.
* Level 2: Exploring implementation of the ILS.
* Level 3: Transitioning to an ILS-led educational system.
* Level 4: Attaining the benefits of an ILS-led educational system.
* Level 5: Fully implementing an ILS-led educational system.

This study has both quantitative and qualitative components. During the fourth year, the researchers surveyed a stratified random sample of 2,642 teachers and 137 building principals to determine the extent to which they were implementing ILS in their classrooms, schools, and districts. The researchers also conducted intensive case studies of ILS implementation in six districts (with one to two schools from each district) -- the latter consisting of 20 site visits. Additionally, ten site visits and twelve telephone interviews were conducted with “High-Performance, High Poverty” schools for the purpose of identifying successful strategies for ILS implementation.

**Year 4 Findings**

- Implementation has remained steady (no increase) in the past year, with 43% of schools at “Level 3.”
- Professional development, curriculum development and district/school infrastructure are the most highly implemented dimensions. Instruction and affective response also reflect Level 3 implementation.
- Community and stakeholder involvement has increased, but remains low.
- Relationships between ISAT performance and ILS implementation are beginning to emerge.
- Stakeholders identify four effects of standards implementation:
  - The Standards have brought a new focus and clarity to school improvement efforts
  - ILS implementation has promoted more meaningful involvement and engagement of teachers and administrators toward the goal of student learning
  - There is a growing acceptance and understanding of standards-based reform
  - The ILS provide a means of assuring a more equitable education for all students.
- Local implementation efforts face pressing challenges.
- Concerns regarding ISAT, ISBE and teacher preparation hinder local implementation.
Potentially the most significant among these findings is that the evaluation researchers identified significant correlations between ILS implementation and student ISAT performance in specific content areas. Students attending schools with higher overall ILS implementation levels (controlling for poverty and mobility) scored higher in grade 3 reading, grade 5 math, and grade 8 math. Likewise, schools with higher district and school infrastructure supportive of the Learning Standards produced greater numbers of “Meets” and “Exceeds” scores in grade 3 reading and in grade 5 writing. This is believed to be the first study in the country to establish significant quantitative correlations between standards use and achievement.

Finally, although survey data indicate that teacher education programs are beginning to incorporate ILS into preservice curricula, local administrators still report that novice teachers are not well versed in ILS.

Year 4 Recommendations

The State should:

- continue to promote the central role of ILS in state accountability and assessment;
- set explicit expectations for local ILS implementation;
- foster and support capacity building at the local level for effective standards implementation, focusing on data-based decision-making and instructional change; and
- clarify the relationship between state assessments and ILS:
  - Publish the results of content validity studies that demonstrate alignment between ISAT/PSAE and ILS.
  - Make clear to LEAs the areas in which local assessments must address ILS not covered by the state assessments.
  - Revise the ISAT/PSAE reporting strategies to align more closely with ILS.

A more detailed summary of findings and recommendations is attached.

Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications

Policy Implications:

During the four years this study has been in place, the Board has periodically considered the issue of what constitutes an acceptable level of ILS implementation. As noted in the study, considerable numbers of schools have made sizable gains in ILS implementation over the last four years, but few have reached the highest levels of
implementation. Two products of this study, the Indicators of Implementation, and the Ten Characteristics of Implementation, are resources the agency has available in setting clear expectations for acceptable levels of local ILS implementation. As the state continues to promote the central role of ILS in state accountability and assessment, it may be time to identify those schools that meet or exceed the acceptable levels and target special assistance to those who do not.

One of ISBE’s roles is to build capacity among teachers and administrators to structure their schools, curriculum and teaching methods toward successful student learning of the standards. Attached to this cover is a “sampler” of systemic efforts ISBE has undertaken to provide assistance to school districts for standards implementation. Since the Board adopted the Learning Standards in 1997, agency programs have been geared toward the achievement of the standards. To what extent can projects, programs and activities of ISBE be more aligned and focused on supporting classroom use of the Illinois Learning Standards?

ISBE has devoted a great deal of effort in the past two years developing a comprehensive set of grade-by-grade performance standards for every Illinois Learning Standard and benchmark (described in “sampler” document). These performance standards include:

- performance descriptors;
- classroom tasks;
- scoring guides; and
- samples of student work that meets and/or exceeds the standard.

These materials were developed and validated by teachers in more than 280 school districts, and now form a library of resources for teachers throughout the state. They are used in the Standards-Aligned Classroom training offered by the ROEs, and will anchor the continuous improvement and alignment of the ISAT and PSAE state tests.

Perhaps the greatest policy implication for these materials is the potential use of the high school performance standards to develop “curriculum frameworks” for the core courses needed for strong performance on the PSAE and for college preparation. Once curricular outlines for the “high school core” are available, the state can proceed with aligning graduation requirements, the high school exit exam, and college entrance requirements.

State assessments are widely recognized by local educators as a means of judging school quality, however, the relationship between the assessments and ILS remain unclear to them. The Assessment and Accountability Task Force will consider this issue in the scope of its review as it forges a new vision of assessment and accountability for the state.

Finally, given the emerging correlation between standards and achievement and the potential landmark nature of this study in that regard, the Board should consider a second phase of the study through a new Request for Proposals and bidding process.
**Superintendent’s Recommendation**

The Superintendent recommends that

- the Board direct the staff to complete a gap analysis of the report recommendations and ISBE’s current activities, culminating in a response and work plan for continuing standards implementation in the State;
- the Board ask the Assessment and Accountability Task Force take up for consideration the report recommendations regarding state assessments;
- the Board authorize a project to develop high school coursework “frameworks” based on the high school ILS performance standards, and pursue additional policy discussions around core curriculum in the coming months; and
- the Board authorize a second-phase evaluation/study to answer additional questions about effective state policies and support that can help districts improve student achievement in relation to the Illinois Learning Standards.

**Next Steps**

In upcoming Board meetings, several standards implementation projects will be highlighted as appropriate.

Staff will undertake analyses and follow up activities as authorized by the Board and directed by the Superintendent.