ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
April 30, 2003

TO: Illinois State Board of Education

FROM: Robert E. Schiller, Superintendent  
Lynne Haefele Curry, Director  
Gail Lieberman, Acting Director  

Agenda Topic: DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEM:  
Report of the Assessment and Accountability 
Task Force  

Staff Contact(s): Don Full and Connie Wise

Purpose of Agenda Item
- To keep the Board apprised of current actions regarding assessment and accountability.
- To take action on several items recommended by the Assessment and Accountability Task Force.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item
The Board will be apprised of the current events regarding further work by the Superintendent's Assessment and Accountability Task Force, as well as action to continue implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

Background Information  
Task Force Action
Since the last meeting of the Board, the task force has met on three occasions. At the April 9, 2003 meeting, several items were recommended for board consideration and action: 1) graduation rate; and 2) use of untimed tests. They also discussed whether to modify the adopted attendance rate threshold number adopted by the Board in March (pursuant to their recommendation), and chose not to do so at this time.

Peer Review
NCLB requires that states submit their accountability plans for federal approval by May 1, 2003. Required components of the plan were outlined in the Board materials for January 2003 and submitted to USDE on January 31st. A peer review was conducted by USDE staff and peers on March 27th. Initial feedback was conveyed verbally to staff on April 10th. As outlined in prior board materials, a final document must be submitted by May 1, 2003 in order to receive the grant awards for 2003-04 in a timely fashion. A revised document will be submitted on May 1st.
Graduation Rate
The Board adopted "attendance" at the elementary/middle school level and "graduation" at the high school level as the two indicators needed as components of the adequate yearly progress criteria. At the April 9th meeting, the task force recommended that there be a gradual increase in the threshold number for graduation rate, and not a single number used. The average state graduation rate in 2001-02 was 85%. Looking at 85% would mean an impact as follows:

Table 1. Number/Percent Of Schools That Would Fail to Make AYP For The Minimum Graduation Rate Based On The Following Thresholds (2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Entire State</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Non-Chicago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.29%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65%</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.02%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75%</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>13.95%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>22.10%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>34.33%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>638</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
<td><strong>565</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recommendation of the task force was for a beginning threshold of 65%, increasing 2%/year until 85% is reached.

After review of that recommendation, Dr. Schiller asked the task force to reconsider the trajectory of the threshold number (not the numbers themselves), to align with the trajectory of the Illini Plan. Members of the task force were polled on April 18th and voted in formal action at their meeting on April 22nd to support a plan aligned with the Illini Plan.
Untimed Tests
The task force members also discussed on April 9th the number of hours for ISAT testing reflected in House Bill 2352, and that it could range from 35-40 hours across grades 3-8 for an individual student during those six years. There was also discussion that some students do not have sufficient time to complete the test in the allotted minutes, and therefore schools are unable to demonstrate truly what students know and are able to do. All agreed the test should be what students know and are able to do rather than how well they perform within a given timeframe. There were discussions on how this could be done even-handedly across Illinois.

Dr. Rosborg of Belleville shared information about timing and a commercially-available norm-referenced test. This firm states that they will be giving students the opportunity to respond to each problem. They recommend allowing students to continue with a subtest as long as he or she is productively engaged in the subtest. If they are still attempting to answer items, let them continue. In the case of this particular firm’s test, time was not used as a variable when they standardized and created the norms for this test.

There is information in the literature about the value of timed and the value of untimed tests. A few comments follow, as does a published copyrighted article of February 2003 from the Wall Street Journal at the end of this report:

- There is agreement that individuals with disabilities with IEPs which call for untimed tests or various accommodations will be allowed and used. There
are also numerous standardized tests which can be taken with extended time by students with documented learning disabilities or other handicaps.

- Other documents state that by measuring a very narrow range of abilities—most notably, the ability to take a standardized test—the tests provide a mere snapshot of the student, and cause him or her to be defined by test scores alone. The tests do not account for different learning styles.

- Many teachers who give a reading test as a part of their initial student assessments decide to give tests without time limits, fearing that a timed test will intimidate new students. Some say that giving untimed standardized tests results in meaningless scores.

- The word standardized refers to the standards for giving these tests. The scores are only meaningful if all test-takers take the test under the same conditions—the same directions and the same amount of time to complete the test.

- Another view is about SATs. Universities will no longer be informed of applicants who received extra time to take the Scholastic Assessment Test or the American College Test because of learning disabilities. In the past, an asterisk was placed next to the name of the student who took the SAT untimed. The College Board, which owns the SAT, will no longer flag students who take the test untimed at the start of the 2003-2004 school year.

The task force adopted the following motion: "The AATF believes that students should have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the Illinois Learning Standards. Therefore, we recommend that students who are continuously, productively engaged in completing the test be allowed to complete the test uninterrupted, in the same setting, beyond the recommended time. We recommend that test administrative guidelines be established by ISBE for the teachers. This should go into effect for ISAT 2004."

There was specific concern that guidelines must be developed and used uniformly in order that this option would work fairly across Illinois.

**Attendance Rates**

At an earlier meeting this year the task force recommended an attendance threshold rate of 88%. The Board subsequently adopted that figure. The task force revisited the single static figure on April 18th and April 22nd, and made the following motion on April 22nd: "the attendance rate threshold should begin at 88% in 2003 and continue to 92% in 2014."

The task force reviewed the idea of making the increments unequal, thus aligning with the Illini Plan. However, as there was only a four point spread and the desire to use whole numbers, the plan proposed in Figure 2 is not unequal.
**Reports from Subcommittees**

**IAA**

The IAA Subcommittee met on April 3rd and 8th. They reported out to the full task force at the April 9, 2003 meeting. They discussed survey results on reporting and IAA in future years.

There were over 100 responses to the February 2003 survey of district superintendents and directors of special education. Responses were mixed, although superintendents were more comfortable with the current system than special education directors. The issue turned into a two part question: 1) where do the results go? And 2) where do the results count? Susan Shea reminded us all of a now long-standing policy that results count in the home school. There was a motion and second for the following resolution/motion, which then passed: "**Whereas, receiving schools, districts and co-ops would benefit from state test data on the students they serve, individually, program-wide and cooperative-wide, scores should be reported to home schools for accountability and to receiving schools, districts and co-ops, if different, for information purposes.**"

There was further discussion by Dr. Rebarber, suggesting the need for checking this motion against the "full year" requirement. That will be done before final action occurs.
There was discussion again about administering the IAA as it now is again for 2003-04. Two requests were made: to have equal periods of time for the reporting periods for the portfolio; and to request additional APIs at the top and bottom range. There was a motion and second as follows, which then passed: "The IAA for school year 2003-04 and future school years, if any, shall include two collection periods of equal length."

Staff was requested to work with Measured Progress on additional APIs. Staff can proceed with those motions as that was the intent from the last dialogue on this issue.

**Status of Legislation**
HB 2352 regarding student assessment was passed by the House and is now before the Senate Education Committee as of this writing.

SB 878 regarding school accountability was passed by the Senate as a shell bill, awaiting final language. The final meeting of the task force, to date and on April 22nd, was spent reviewing the accountability language again.

The outcome will be shared at the Board’s April 30th Legislative Committee and board meetings.

**Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications**
To date the task force has met 29 times (eleven full meetings; five public hearings; two writing subcommittee meetings; seven IAA subcommittee meetings; and four IMAGE subcommittee meetings) to date. Another meeting is scheduled for April 28th. The Superintendent has committed to now meeting on a periodic basis with the task force regarding the implementation of the assessment and accountability laws.

**Communication**
Accountability is the most high-stakes component of state and federal education law. Changes will require clear and specific information for school boards, school district staff, parents and the public.

**Superintendent’s Recommendation**
The Superintendent recommends that the Board receive this report on the task force’s recommendations, and consider approval of its recommendations:
- That the graduation rate threshold as outlined in Figure 1 be adopted, with a beginning point of 65% and ending point of 85% in unequal increments.
- That the task force's motion on untimed tests be adopted, and staff prepare administrative guidelines to use for ISAT 2004.
- That the attendance rate threshold as outlined in Figure 2 be adopted, with a beginning point of 88% in 2003 and ending point of 92% in 2014.

**Next Steps**
The Superintendent will continue meetings with the Task Force as needed.
Next steps include the necessary statutory and regulatory changes to implement these suggested actions and prior Board actions. Concurrent with statutory change will be the peer review process by USDE and final action with the Accountability Workbook, on May 1st, and implementation of that text. Also concurrent with statutory change will be a new Request for Proposals (RFP) for assessment contractor(s) in order to work toward change in 2006 if not sooner.
Making Every Minute Count
New Federal Law Sparks a Debate: Should Standardized Tests Be Timed?

BY JUNE KRONHOLZ, STAFF REPORTER OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Should time matter? It does in life and sports and bus schedules. But, increasingly, it doesn’t in standardized tests. Four months ago, the College Board and ACT announced that they will stop flagging the scores of test takers who receive extra time on their college-entrance exams because of physical or learning disabilities. The decision raised concerns that ambitious parents would try to secure extra time for their kids, giving them an advantage in college admission.

But it also highlighted a debate among testing professionals: Why time tests at all? What matters “is that you demonstrate what you know, tell us if you’ve mastered the content,” argues John Twing, vice president for testing at NCS Pearson, which writes and administers the annual Texas state exam, among others. “Time confounds how much you know with how quickly you recall it,” he says.

The issue is suddenly important because the number of tests that states give students is about to balloon. Beginning in 2005, the new federal education law will require each state to test every child every year in reading and math and, starting in 2007, in science. The law carries penalties for the schools—students in low-performing schools can transfer to better ones, taking their funding with them—and those penalties will get steeper every year. States, meanwhile, are raising the stakes further. Some are offering cash bonuses to schools with good test scores, and many are putting plans in place to deny diplomas to students who don’t pass their state exams.

Waste of Time

Timing a test helps to standardize conditions so that student results can be compared among schools and across states. That’s particularly important for so-called norm-referenced tests like the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and TerraNova. Both tests are widely given to elementary-school students whose scores are then compared with a national average or norm, and reported as a percentile. To make sure every child has the same chance to do well, most norm-referenced exams come with elaborate instructions about lighting conditions, breaks, classroom temperature and time. “If we want unstandardized measures, we have grades,” says Wayne Camara, research director at the College Board, whose SATs are norm-referenced exams.

But there are other, more simple reasons to time tests, he adds. Schools want to know when their classrooms will be free for other uses, parents want to know when to pick up their children, and the test companies need to budget for proctors. The SAT also worries about a wily test taker walking away with a test booklet if students are allowed to leave whenever they choose. And grade schools worry about giving up teaching time for tests. “There’s too much going on in school, too much to learn to give unlimited time,” says H.D. Hoover, professor of education at University of Iowa and the senior author of the Iowa test. “It’s wasteful.”

Still, opposition to testing is being fueled by fears that timed tests put too much stress on students. The high stakes tempt some teachers to cheat by offering test takers more time. Moreover, timing complicates testing for disabled students, who account for about 12% of all youngsters nationally. These students typically get extra time, but it often isn’t enough to overcome their handicaps (the College Board says extra time gives disabled kids only a 40-point boost on the 1,600-point SAT).
The move to untimed tests is also being pushed by the new federal law, which requires that children be tested on their state’s curriculum, rather than on general knowledge. In those curriculum tests, the goal is to see whether children have mastered their lessons, and then to use the results to diagnose learning gaps.

‘Settle In’

Michigan doesn’t time its curriculum-based tests because “we believe kids should be measured on what they know,” says T.J. Buchholz, a spokesman for the education department in Michigan, which awards scholarships to high-school youngsters who score well. Similarly, children typically take an hour or two to complete each section of Virginia’s exam, “but if it takes them longer, it takes them longer,” says Charles Pyle, an education department spokesman. In Texas, “some kids pack their lunch and settle in,” says NCS Pearson’s Mr. Twing.

The decision by the College Board and ACT to stop telling colleges which students take their tests under special conditions is only adding to the doubts. The College Board says about one in 54 of the SATs it gave last year was to someone who received extra time, typically an additional 1½ hours on the three-hour test, but occasionally even more. The personalized education plan that follows a disabled child though school determines what accommodations the College Board will allow, but they may include a personal reader or writer, and even triple time to take exams.

Qualifying for those accommodations is so tough that the College Board and ACT say they don’t expect to see an increase in requests for extended time. But because the ACT and SAT are the ultimate high-stakes tests, there are already rumors of parents doing end-runs around special education rules and hiring psychologists to certify that their children deserve extra time.

Ultimately, that extra time may not matter. When the College Board gave additional time to students in two recent experiments, the extra minutes made only slight differences in most scores, and didn’t help women or minorities, who typically score lower than white males on the SAT. Only youngsters with very high scores did particularly better when they had extra time, and then, only on the math exam. “If you don’t know math, more time won’t help you,” says the College Board’s Mr. Camara.