

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Gov. Blagojevich signs laws reducing administrative burden on Illinois schools

Bill package focuses on paperwork reduction, accelerated reimbursement and increased flexibility

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today signed four bills into law that will help Illinois schools by reducing paperwork, speeding up reimbursements and allowing local districts more flexibility. By signing House Bills 3680 and 404, and Senate Bills 1734 and 1851 into law, the Governor is building on his effort to reduce administrative red tape, letting schools focus their attention on the important work of educating children. Since the Governor appointed a new State Board of Education in the fall of 2004, it has already reduced the volumes of school administrative rules by 400 pages, eliminated the teachers’ certification backlog and significantly improved the accuracy and timeliness of school performance reports.

“We have to get rid of requirements that do nothing to help kids and create piles of paperwork for schools,” said Gov. Blagojevich. “The State Board of Education has already eliminated hundreds of pages of unnecessary rules, and we have pushed for changes in the law that will make it easier for local districts to focus on teaching. These new laws are another step in the right direction as we continue our work to improve education in Illinois.”

Paperwork Reduction

- Sponsored by Rep. Milton Patterson (D-Chicago) and Sen. Jacqueline Collins (D-Chicago), **HB 3680** removes the requirement that school districts certify to the Illinois State Board of Education that serious safety hazards continue to exist within the district. Current law allows local school boards to provide free student transportation to their students based on the local board’s annual determination that walking conditions within 1.5 miles of the school present a serious safety hazard, based on Illinois Department of Transportation guidelines. School districts must continue to make this determination on

an annual basis, but are not required to submit certification to ISBE. The new law, effective July 1, 2005, removes redundant paperwork and reporting for local districts.

“This law lets school districts continue to provide for the safety of their students without having to complete unneeded paperwork each year,” said Patterson. “Schools are already working with the Department of Transportation on this safety issue. Making them report to the State Board on it, too, just didn’t make sense.”

Accelerated Reimbursement

- **SB 1734**, sponsored by Sen. Susan Garrett (D-Highwood) and Rep. Karen May (D-Highland Park), removes a requirement for school districts to submit claim forms for reimbursement from the Driver Education Fund. The new law establishes Driver Education Fund reimbursement to districts on a quarterly basis instead of annually and removes the provision that a district’s reimbursement could not exceed the per-pupil instruction and practice driving costs.

“Making schools wait a full year before reimbursing them for the costs of teaching students how to drive just didn’t make sense,” said Sen. Garrett. “We have made good changes to the law to reimburse schools more quickly for money they’ve spent and we eliminated a ridiculous requirement to submit claim forms in duplicate. Schools have a tough enough job to do without meeting the unnecessary requirements of obsolete laws.”

Increased Flexibility

- Sponsored by Rep. Roger Eddy (R-Hutsonville) and Sen. Dan Cronin (R-Lombard), **HB 404** allows schools flexibility when administering the 1.5 day Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). The new law provides that a school may shorten the day below five clock hours to accommodate the required testing procedures and still allow the shortened day to be countered towards the 176 days of pupil attendance required each year.

Current law requires five clock hours of instruction. However, if a district has already “banked” additional minutes by exceeding the five hour minimum on other school days, those districts can count the shortened day as a full day towards the Average Daily Attendance requirement. Although districts could do this in the past, it required a modification of the School Code from the ISBE. Under this law, school districts are afforded the flexibility without additional paperwork.

“We’re very pleased the Governor is acting to ease some of the burden the federal education law places on local schools,” said Illinois Education Association President Ken Swanson. “Until now, districts could be penalized for complying with the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) if they dedicated a day to the Prairie State exam. This bill brings some common sense to table and we are grateful for the Governor’s support.”

While the Illinois School Code requires attending of 300 daily minutes, if a district has already “banked” additional minutes by exceeding the five hour minimum on other school days, this law allows those districts to count the shortened day as a full day towards its Average Daily Attendance requirement.

- **SB 1851**, sponsored by Sen. Kimberly Lightford (D-Westchester) and Rep. William Delgado (D-Chicago), removes specific statutory dates for districts to file estimated reimbursement claims for the cost of providing transitional bilingual education services. Previously, the law stipulated four dates

throughout the calendar year, and placed districts at risk of forfeiting their State reimbursement if they did file final claims by July 20 each year.

“There’s a growing need for bilingual education in communities throughout the state,” said Sen. Lightford. “Yet, the needs in each school district are unique. Programs and scheduling have to be tailored to each community’s needs. We can’t put funding for these important programs at risk because of an arbitrary deadline. This new law keeps that from happening.”

Illinois Schools Benefit from Governor’s Education Reform initiatives

The Governor’s bill signing today is a continuation of his work to reform education in Illinois to help Illinois schools. When Governor Blagojevich appointed seven new members to the State Board in September of 2004, he charged them with reducing red tape for schools, eliminating the teacher certification backlog, helping schools save money that could be redirected into classrooms and eliminating the State Board’s persistent delays and inaccuracies in providing data to local schools and districts. Under its new leadership, the Illinois State Board of Education has made good progress in each of these areas.

ISBE has begun the process of reducing the administrative rules and paperwork that burden Illinois schools through its Less Red Tape initiative, which has already yielded a reduction of over 400 pages of administrative rules. One major step in this process occurred when the State Board aligned the state and federal school accountability requirements. This action allows schools to focus on meeting the increasingly difficult Federal standards under No Child Left Behind. Prior to this action, Illinois school districts were forced to work under two systems that were not designed to complement one another.

Reporting for the state system created duplicative “paper chase” requirements that forced schools to complete added forms and paperwork that did not necessarily increase accountability.

The Governor also charged the Board with eliminating Illinois’ massive teacher certification backlog.

In just a few months under the State Board’s new leadership, the backlog that frustrated teachers, schools and districts is gone. In looking to prevent any future backlogs, Gov. Blagojevich has signed a law that reduced teacher recertification paperwork from nearly 100 pages to just two or three pages. In addition, the State Board is looking at ways to streamline the rules that govern teacher certification while keeping the highest level of accountability for Illinois’ educators. And, the agency is working with universities and teacher unions to create a website that provides an online, one-stop shop for certification, recertification and employment opportunities.

Another major concern the Governor drew attention to last year was the State Board’s error-filled reporting on school performance data. The errors and delays under the previous agency leadership caused serious difficulties for schools and districts whose School Improvement Status required them to communicate the option of School Choice and Supplemental Education Services (SES) to parents. The new State Board addressed this issue as one of its first initiatives to help schools, students and parents. Just a few months after the 2005 student testing was completed, ISBE has begun to release Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) School Status Reports to Illinois schools and districts that have completed their data approval process. Under the new agency leadership, this year’s reports are being released to schools months earlier than in any previous year.

ISBE’s work to respond to the Governor’s charge to help schools save money has resulted in the creation of the Illinois School Purchasing Network. The network offers all school districts in Illinois access to high-quality products at some of the best available government prices. More than 100 districts in districts in Illinois have already registered for the program in its first two months.