

November 1, 2005

Hello Illinois Educators!

My name is Jacque Bolger and in April, I was named the Illinois Teacher of the Year for 2005-2006. I am very proud to be representing all of the teachers in this great state. This has been such an incredible year for me! Although I have taught for 34 years, I have experienced countless events or opportunities which have allowed me to continue to learn! 2005 started out sadly with the death of my mother in February, but she had lived for 92 years and she remained physically and intellectually active until the very end - delighting in acquiring new knowledge at each stage of her life. When I discovered that I was a finalist in the teacher category of Those Who Excel and eventually was named as Illinois Teacher of the Year, I was pretty sure that she had her hand in it!

During the summer, I spent a lot of time with my sister as she recovered from a mastectomy and subsequent reconstruction, and I learned about the strength of family and the power of informed choices. I am amazed at and grateful for the progress that scientists make daily in cancer research and I try to keep up-to-date in my own research.

On August 29, the same day that Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, my first grandchild, Brady John, was born in O'Fallon, Missouri. I continue to marvel at the miracle of childbirth and can't wait to see what Brady will love the most about his own education! My biggest fear is that I will not be able to help him with his homework because I won't understand what he is learning! 📖

I wanted to take a moment to thank all of my hosts and hostesses so far on my incredible journey around the state and to welcome the opportunity to visit even more! My goal for this year is to visit as many schools (elementary, secondary and post-secondary), districts, civic groups and legislative committees as possible and to celebrate the excellence that already exists in each of them! I would love to be the spokesperson for that excellence and to journal about the highlights of each visit on this website.

So to begin, I send a belated thank you to State Superintendent Dr. Randy Dunn and the individual members of the Illinois State Board of Education, chaired by Jesse Ruiz, for inviting me to their monthly board meeting in Springfield in

June. Later on that month, I visited both the Libertyville and Schaumburg campuses of Motorola, a major sponsor of the Those Who Excel program. My host, Fred Ettinger, was very thorough in his tour; I met many student interns, employees, managers, directors, and executives of this mega-corporation that emphasizes the importance of education so much that they fund graduate studies and give away thousands of dollars in grants.

As schools were getting ready to open their doors for a new year, I visited Governors State University to talk with new teachers and their mentors and visited with teachers in the Westchester and Rockton Districts. I even recorded some radio commercials for public radio in which I emphasized that teachers cannot do it alone - we can definitely make a difference by working together with parents.

September and October brought more opportunities to speak about the importance of education as I visited with the retired teachers of Winnebago County as well as Hononegah retired staff, met with soon-to-be teachers at Eastern Illinois University and National Lewis University and accompanied my principal to testify to both the House and State Education Committees in Springfield.

On October 18, I met the wonderful staff at Tinley Park High School, where I attended a luncheon with various award winners on staff, toured the school and visited classes in all curricular areas and met with administrators from all four schools in this high school district. Let me assure you, excellence abounds at Tinley Park, and it is evident from the moment you walk into the building. We ate lunch in a room where Principal John McGraw proudly displays the plaques and trophies that his teachers have won throughout the years and he celebrates the success of his staff and students by heaping on praise and recognition. He takes out full-page color ads that display photos of TPHS winners: faculty and students, academic and athletic honors. He convinces local florists to adopt the school; virtually every office and stairwell in the building boasts a fresh centerpiece that changes monthly. He visits local merchants on a monthly basis and obtains gift certificates for restaurants, hair salons, grocery stores, gas stations, office supply stores, etc. that he gives away to the staff and students. He created a "Step Up" program that invites students who have been identified by faculty to step up to the next level of difficulty. This year, 75 students in this school of 1100 accepted the invitation to challenge themselves because

they had been nominated by a faculty member who had faith in their ability to do well in difficult classes.

My hosts for the afternoon were Associate Principal Bill Kendall, PPS Director Laura Berry and English teacher Sue O'Malley. I stood in the hallway between classes and I was amazed that I heard no profanity and that I saw no one loitering in the hallway at the end of the 5-minute passing period. Everyone proceeded from one class to the next in an orderly and polite manner. Tones greet the students, staff and visitors to mark the end of one class and the beginning of the next. Every class that I visited produced the same end result - the kids were actively engaged in the lesson and willingly participated in the class discussion. During my two-hour tour of the school, I stepped in and observed classes from every curricular area: science, math, foreign language, social studies, family and consumer sciences, fine arts. I observed students in an AP class as well as students who give up their free time before and after school so that the award-winning school newspaper gets published. I talked with administrators who all say the same thing: people do well at Tinley Park because they feel good about their abilities and their accomplishments. The staff and the students demonstrate respect towards each other and they are proud to be part of Tinley Park! Thanks to everyone for sharing your success with me! I had a wonderful time and I look forward to visiting other schools around the state so I can brag about them as well!

Here is a loose outline of upcoming visits: Illinois State University, Antioch District 117, Northern Winnebago Kiwanis Club, Northern Illinois University, Northern Winnebago Rotary Club, Lincoln-Way East HS, Maine Township Foreign Language Department (I am a proud grad of Maine West - Class of '67!), Freeport new teachers, Sauk Valley CC Fine Arts Seminar, Durand Elementary School, Wilmington SD, East Colona SD, Alwood SD and Keeneyville Elementary SD 20.

Greetings from the road! I'd like to spend a few minutes giving an update on my latest round of school visits. During the month of November, I visited Illinois State and Northern Illinois and met hundreds of students who are at various levels of teacher preparation. I love talking to education students because they are so full of enthusiasm and they ask a million questions! I am also amazed at their stamina. The ACEI branch at ISU meets at 8:30 p.m. on Monday evenings! They stayed alert and awake during my hour-long presentation and asked insightful questions at the end! After my ISU presentation, I went to the Illinois Wesleyan Student Center and visited with several former students - which is always an affirmation of how much influence teachers really have on their students.

In DeKalb, I was the guest speaker for the combined five sections of students enrolled in LAS 2100. It was a miserable rainy Monday afternoon; but once again, the mood of the students was upbeat, they asked excellent questions and shared insightful observations. Every time I speak at the college level, I walk away impressed with this new generation of teachers! I am so proud of our profession and eternally grateful to have this opportunity to meet future and current educators.

In Antioch, I had the opportunity to address the high school certified staff and meet several of them afterwards. I keep making connections as one of the teachers told me that his father graduated from Maine West with me and the Athletic Director at Antioch turned out to be roommate at Millikin with one of my current colleagues! Wow, there really are only 6 degrees of separation among people!

The Rotary breakfast was great - because my audience was not limited to educators (although 3 of the club's members are local superintendents). I was able to speak about my 3 passions of modern education: the importance of electives at all levels of curriculum, the changing nature of respect, and the lack of funding for education. Give me a soapbox and I can talk for hours!

During Thanksgiving week, I was invited to observe at Lincoln-Way East High School in Frankfort, and I was very impressed with the physical building as well as everyone whom I met that day: several members from the administrative team and the foreign language department, Peg Bobber, department chair for foreign languages, French teacher Dawn Floyd and her French students. My

general impression of students at LWE? They come to class, even on a Monday, ready to be engaged in their learning and their lessons! From the moment they walked through the door on a Monday morning, they were speaking in French and participating completely. Lincoln-Way East is a large campus with a small school atmosphere: student-generated murals greet the visitor and hallways are decorated with student art, posters, etc. The foreign language teachers have taken several courses from PLS, and the students work in groups to practice and perform tasks designed to help them review for tests. On the day I observed, the first year students played a verb review relay race as a bellringer before learning the months of the year, numbers above 1000 and the names and sounds of several domestic animals. The second year students used flyswatters to review vocabulary words, completed a unit review sheet and then participated in a lively game of Danger - the French version of Jeopardy!

Dawn's challenge, as most foreign language teachers experience sometime in their career, is at least one section of combined levels. Dawn teaches a combined French 3/AP French 4 class. On the day that I visited, her 4th year students were finishing a collage of transitional words when writing a composition and then preparing to write an in-class essay on the most influential person of the twentieth century. As the 4th year kids worked in one part of the room, the 3rd year students worked in groups of three writing a story combining vocabulary, the imperfect and past tenses in order to review for their unit test. At the end of the class, the 3rd year students shared their stories, while the rest of the class gave advice (using the subjunctive mood, *bien sûr*) to the storytellers.

Frankfort is a fast-growing community; no teacher can prepare in his/her classroom because every classroom is used every hour of the school day. The teachers are preparing for next year's split schedule in order to accommodate the 4000 students attending Lincoln-Way East. This coming spring, the district will have a referendum for not one, but two new high schools for the district! I had a wonderful time and I love sharing my experiences with all of Illinois!

On Tuesday, November 22, I took a step backwards in time, as I returned to my Alma Mater, Maine West in Des Plaines, for the first time since 1967! I was surprised how much I actually remembered. I met the foreign language staff from all three schools in the district (Maine East, Maine West and Maine

South), who greeted me warmly and listened to my presentation with appreciation and nodding heads. I shared some ideas of what I do in my classroom to keep students on task; afterwards, several of them thanked me for giving them affirmation for what they have always done in the classroom! I had a ball! By the way, the foreign language coordinator for the district just happens to be my niece - Susan Kramer - and I couldn't be prouder of her!

December turned out to be a month of rescheduling. I am now scheduled to talk to the new teachers in the Freeport District in February and we are looking for an available date in January or February to speak at Rock Valley Heritage Kiwanis Club. I was able to give an update to the ISBE in mid-December, after an incredible tour of two schools in the Pilsen area of Chicago. (Please keep reading for my report of that morning). I also returned to my home school to teach Christmas carols in French in preparation for our annual caroling party through downtown Rockton. Even though our French and Spanish clubs were cancelled this year, we decided that the caroling party had to continue!

On Thursday, December 15, members of the Illinois State Board of Education, other guests and I were fortunate to visit the incredible facility of El Valor - the Guadalupe Reyes Children and Family Center, the Orozco Elementary School and the Mexican Fine Arts Cultural Center and Museum, all located within walking distance from each other. El Valor was founded by Guadalupe Reyes to help her infant son who was born with developmental and physical disabilities. Trained personnel work with children with disabilities from birth through preschool; but the program has grown so that it now boasts a 1 on 5 tutoring program, music programs that are not available anywhere else in the Chicago public schools, youth enrichment programs, leadership programs, entrepreneurship programs, parenting programs which teach parents to recognize baby cues and comprehend baby language, ESL and GED programs and a cohort initiative with local colleges so that students can earn a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree by attending courses at the Center at night or on the weekends. El Valor's mission is to encourage all parents to sing, talk and read to their children from birth on so that they will be ready for school!

A short walk down the street took us to Orozco Elementary School where the children were quietly engaged in their lessons and busily preparing for their holiday program. We were enthralled as we watched the rehearsals of the first graders as well as a traditional Mexican dance troupe, a contemporary jazz

dance troupe and the newly-formed gymnastic team.

Talk about dedication! The dance troupes and the gymnastic team meet at 7:30 in the morning anywhere from 3-4 times a week! We were so mesmerized; we did not want to leave!

I hope that the last week of December found all of you enjoying some time with family and friends. Once the school year resumes, I will be speaking at a Fine Arts Conference in Dixon sponsored by the Whiteside County Regional Office of Education, the New Teachers Academy at my home school Hononegah, in Rockton and at a School Improvement Day in Durand.

Salut, tout le monde! It's time for another update! Now that most of winter is behind us (?), I look forward to spring weather and putting more miles on my car as I travel around the state. I still have plenty of time to come to your school to observe all of the excellent teaching that takes place there. Please, invite me to your school!

I started off the New Year with a visit to Sauk Valley Community College on January 6 to speak about the importance of Fine Arts in the curriculum. I was very impressed with this Fine Arts Conference, the 16th that has been organized by the Whiteside County Regional Office of Education. Kudos to all of the organizers of the event, especially Betty Clementz - a former French teacher (yes, I know that I am showing some favoritism here) who taught for 34 years and then went to work at the ROE. Teaching really does keep us young!

I also worked with the new teachers at my home school - Hononegah Community High School in Rockton, Illinois. As I have mentioned before, I am very impressed with the new teachers whom I have met - they are so enthusiastic about the profession and they are very gracious and inquisitive, even at 7:30 on a Monday morning!

The weather has been cooperative as I have traveled down many back roads to the rural communities. The administrators in the Durand School district were very helpful as I kicked off the afternoon's program, and it was great to see familiar faces, especially my cousin Cindy.

Since part of my responsibilities at Hononegah is to act as the advisor of Key Club, I try to attend Kiwanis meetings whenever my schedule allows this.

Unfortunately, I have not had too many Friday mornings free, but I was able to attend at least one meeting in January and thank them for all of the support they continue to show our Key Club. Needless to say, I know when Pancake Day is scheduled and will sell my share of tickets!

From January 24 - 29, I attended the National Teacher of the Year Program Conference in Dallas, where I had the opportunity to meet the 55 other Teachers of the Year (49 states, American territories and the Department of Defense Education Activity). We trained on new technology, attended seminars and participated in round table discussions. We were busy but we always found time to talk with each other about our personal philosophy of education. We learned a lot!

When I returned from Dallas, I visited with my daughter Courtenay and grandson Brady for a few days. One afternoon, we visited Woods Creek Elementary School in Crystal Lake where she used to teach 4th grade. While I was there, I talked with her former principal, Dr. Betsy Les, about my observing for a whole day. I really want to visit as many schools as I can this year!

I think what I love the most about traveling around the state and meeting new and veteran teachers is discovering how I know at least one person in the audience! In February, I presented two workshops in Freeport for the new teachers in the district and had fun getting reacquainted with former student teachers from my home school.

Let me tell you, folks, that before the Governor announced his plan to provide preschool for all 4-year olds in Illinois, I had met two very impressive groups of educators who are already serving this age group. Last December, I wrote about meeting the staff of El Valor in Chicago; in February, I did a workshop for the Early Childhood Education staff in Rockford. Between 200 and 300 administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and support staff listened as I talked about the attributes of successful schools but I was in awe as I listened to what they accomplish in a week! I'm going to visit them in action and I can't wait!

The next week I shifted gears and gave an update on my year to two local reporters. I love talking with the press; it helps to spread the word that Illinois is an awesome state in which to teach and learn! I also addressed the Rockford

Heritage Kiwanis group and shared not only my love of community service but also some concerns that I have after teaching for three and a half decades!

Finally, I kicked off the Institute Day focusing on Technology in the Winnebago District. Thanks to Superintendent Dennis Harezlak for the invitation! I loved being there and seeing more familiar faces (spouses or best friends of colleagues, former students who are now teachers). I think I loved reminiscing about all of the changes in technology that I have experienced in my career. I really do not want to go back to those days of manual typewriters, ditto machines and purple fingers!

I had to postpone an appearance on Gary Goldman's radio show when my mother-in-law was rushed to the hospital; I hope to reschedule with him in April.

March is promising to be very busy. I already met the entire teaching and administrative crew in the Wilmington Unit District on March 3. Not only did I have the chance to talk with the staff, but I also met with the superintendent to find out what steps they have taken in an effort to pass an education referendum. They are very organized and have a lot of community support. Best of luck to them in the next few weeks as they seek the resources to provide an excellent education for all students in Wilmington!

In the coming weeks, I will be meeting teachers from Maywood District 89 serving Maywood, Melrose Park and Broadview, exchanging ideas with foreign language teachers from the Barrington schools and addressing the delegates at the IEA Representative Assembly in Rosemont. I'm also looking forward to returning to Rockford College as an "Alum in Residence" where I will talk with members of the TEACH club. In mid March, I get to act as a judge for the Chicago Tribune Scholastic Competition and travel to Peoria for the Two Rivers Professional Institute Day .

It's always good to spend some time at my home school, and for two days I will help to supervise the National Spanish Exam, which will be given online for the very first time. Talk about changes in technology! Immediately following those two days, I will deliver the Keynote address at Loyola University's conference for new and student teachers and education students; later that same evening I will be back at Wilmington High School addressing the Wilmington Education Foundation.

At the end of the month, I will visit with K- 8 teachers from Rock Falls and attend the Alwood District's Institute Day (close to the Quad Cities). I can't wait for this Institute Day - whose theme is "We Are All Teachers of the Year." How cool is that????

So, this is your current Teacher of the Year Jacque Bolger signing off with two requests:

- 1.) Please invite me to visit your school!
- 2.) Please take the time to nominate people for *Those Who Excel*. You will find all the necessary forms at the ISBE website !

Please invite me to visit your school so I can report and brag about all of the wonderful activities that I observe! Remember - I am a spokesperson for all of the excellent education that takes place each and every day in the state of Illinois!

I would love to visit your school and write about its excellence on this webpage! Although I have had to turn down a few invitations (same date - opposite ends of the state), I will do every thing in my power to arrange the calendar so that I can reach my goal (from the beginning of this article): to visit as many schools (elementary, secondary and post-secondary), districts, civic groups and legislative committees as possible and to celebrate the excellence that already exists in each of them!

If you would like to schedule a visit, please contact me at (815) 871-5890 or Colleen Hawkinson at chawki@hononogah.org . Colleen is in charge of my calendar, and she does a fantastic job of keeping everyone informed. I love to visit classrooms and talk with the teachers and students, but I also have two Power Point presentations that I often present to new teachers, during institute or staff development days and community groups. I hope to hear from you soon!