



The Illinois State Advisory Commission on Special Education Legislative Newsletter

#### Council Members 2007-08

Individuals with Disabilities  
Anel Gonzalez (Forest Park)  
Kyle Packer (Effingham)  
Rahnee Patrick (Chicago)  
Susy Woods (Chesterfield)  
Parents of Children with Disabilities  
Beth Conran (St. Charles)  
Nora Donoghue (Highland Park)  
Deb Fornoff (Washington)  
Brad Hedrick (Urbana)  
Tracy Michelin (Springfield)  
Heather Perkins (Freeport)  
Rick Ramirez (Moline)  
Kristine Stanley (Peoria Heights)  
Stanley Valentine (East Peoria)  
Teacher of Students with Disabilities  
Carrie Janes (Aurora)  
General Public  
Jennifer Naddeo (Barrington)  
Private Provider  
Mike Otte (Oak Forest)  
Public Charter Schools  
Elizabeth Purvis (Chicago)  
Special Education Directors  
Teresa Garate (Chicago)  
Jim Surber (LADSE)  
Vocational, Community or Business  
Organization Provider of Transition  
Services  
Sharon Slover (McHenry County)  
Regional Superintendent  
Marie Stiefel (Stevenson Regional)  
LEA Superintendent  
Eric A. King Ph.D (Distr. 159 –  
Aurora)  
Higher Education  
Suzanne Lee (U of I/Urbana)  
DHS Secretary or Designee  
Marjorie Olson  
DOC Director or DJJ Designee  
Janie Shallcross  
ICC Representative  
Marva Campbell-Pruitt

## THE ILLINOIS STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL (ISAC) ON THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES – COMMITTED TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOR ALL ILLINOIS STUDENTS

The members of ISAC represent Illinois stakeholders in the education of children with disabilities and share a personal commitment to improving the educational experience for these students. The Council includes twenty-three persons appointed by the Governor and four ex-officio voting members. These council members are individuals with disabilities, parents of children receiving special education services, teachers, administrators and representatives of agencies that support students with disabilities.

It is estimated that one in five people in our society experiences a disability. In Illinois, our public schools served 2,075,275 students in the 2005/2006 school year. Of those students, 322,541 or nearly 16% received special education services.

School is a major part of life for everyone in our society. Our education prepares us for our personal and vocational future and provides the experience we need to successfully live, work, and play in our communities. Families choose their communities based on the quality of education available for their children.

The quality of special education services is no less significant to families. It is important that the services available to support our children with disabilities are

consistent with best-practice and are research-based. Our children with disabilities must be valued members of their school communities, participating in activities and enjoying the same quality education and high expectations as their non-disabled peers.

Unemployment statistics for people with disabilities remain dismal – an undeniable indicator of the need for continued efforts to improve the educational opportunities for our children with disabilities.

Our goals at ISAC include supporting Illinois schools in their efforts to provide exceptional educational opportunities for students who require special education services.

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**The ISBE Website greets visitors with  
"Illinois Education . . .**

**Second to None".  
ISAC hopes to partner with  
policymakers to ensure this level of  
excellence for students with  
disabilities in Illinois as well!**

## Meet Susy Woods — ISAC Chairperson

When you meet Susy Woods, you automatically think of dynamic, unstoppable, never ending energy and passion, a million different and wonderful descriptors. Let me tell you a little about this woman and see if you don't agree with me after reading this.

Susy, a wife, mother of two children and grandmother of two adorable girls, found herself in a third Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting for her son, Adam, ten years old at the time, disagreeing with the local school district staff who were adamant about busing Adam 110 miles (round trip) a day to attend a school that could manage his health issues. Susy's objections were ignored, so she sent a letter to then First Lady, Barbara Bush, asking for assistance for her son to attend the local school in Carlinville, Illinois. Barbara Bush called Susy personally and the transportation issue was no longer.



*ISAC Chairperson, Susy Woods*

This story doesn't surprise anyone who knows Susy. After working with Barbara Bush, Susy says she learned two life lessons "things happen when you have a political voice behind you and that change only happens from the top down." Susy became involved with the Family Support Network and other organizations and provided witness testimony at committee hearings at the State capitol and before the State legislature concerning special education issues. Susy started with Phil Milsch and Associates about six years ago and has been a lobbyist for disability and poverty issues ever since.

She only wants what is morally right for everyone. Susy's dedication to toddlers, children and adults with disabilities is truly a learned obsession and one that we are all so thankful she learned.

And now for a description of her never-ending energy. Susy is the executive chairperson for the Illinois State Advisory Council for Children With Disabilities (ISAC); she has been a member of this Council for four years. She is an adjunct professor at the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) and teaches in the Women Studies Program; is the Director of Disability Services at UIS, is a board member of ARC of Illinois, IMPACT (Center for Independent Living), UCP, Planned Parenthood, and the Illinois Assistive Technology Program (IATP).

Whew.....Susy also says that she can only do all of this because her children are grown and her husband can cook for himself. I forgot to tell you she has an incredible sense of humor too!

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Among the accomplishments of ISAC in 2006/2007—

- ISAC provided Public Comment on the Part 226 Rules and responded to questions from JCAR regarding specific areas of concern. These changes are reflective of IDEIA 2004 amendments.
- ISAC supported through letters to the General Assembly, HB816 (when student reaches majority age of 18, may appoint an educational surrogate), and HB817 (allows for special education services through the first day before the student's 22nd birthday), both introduced by Rep. Elizabeth Coulson and SB398 (reimbursement to school districts for children whose families do not live in the district), introduced by Sen. Deanna Demuzio.
- ISAC members were active participants in planning, organizing, and sharing information at the Statewide Transition Conference. More than 600 educators, agency professionals, students and family members were in attendance.
- ISAC hosted a Legislative Breakfast in the Capitol Rotunda with special education students from schools across the state greeting legislators, sharing information and preparing and serving breakfast.

## THIRD ANNUAL STATEWIDE TRANSITION CONFERENCE

### How do students with disabilities transition from a student with a disability to an adult with a disability?

Good question.....many young adults, parents, teachers, counselors, professionals in the health field, attended the third annual Illinois Transition Conference in Effingham on December 3rd and 4th, 2007, to find out just how to make a good, strong, successful transition plan.

While accessible transportation to get to and from work might not be an issue in Chicago, it certainly is in southern Illinois. Affordable and accessible housing for young adults with disabilities to live independently is available in most areas of Illinois but is a huge problem in Chicago. People on lists for Section H housing are waiting years or the lists are closed if you want to live in Cook County. How do you plan for post-secondary opportunities? Job training? Finding jobs?

This year's conference was a huge success with more than 600 people attending. Participants gained a better understanding of the transition process and were provided with resources to make successful transition planning happen.

Recent state and federal legislation has put transition planning high on the list of mandatory requirements for students with disabilities. Data collection for student outcomes is now part of the Illinois State Performance Plan, a requirement that the Illinois State Board of Education must complete for the federal Department of Education, Office of Special Education.

We thank the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Division of Specialized Services for Children and many other state agencies for their sponsorship of this valuable information gathering and sharing conference.

So, if you have constituents that have contacted you about transition planning and who feel scattered .....are blowing in the wind.....and not sure where to turn to for good transition planning, suggest they attend the Fourth Annual Transition Conference on October 27th - 29th, 2008 at the Peoria Convention Center. No leaf will remain unturned as we again explore transition planning.

## Mark Your Calendar and Spread the Word!

The 2008/2009 Statewide  
Transition Conference will be  
**October 27—29th, 2008**  
in Peoria at the Civic Center!



## ISAC HAS STATUTORY OBLIGATIONS

The Illinois State Advisory Council on the Education of Children with Disabilities (ISAC) is statutorily mandated by state and federal law to provide advice and policy guidance to the Governor, General Assembly, and the Illinois State Board of Education with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities and the unmet needs of children with disabilities.

The responsibilities of ISAC include:

Advising ISBE regarding:

- all rules and regulations related to the education of children with disabilities promulgated by the Board;
- modifications or additions to county or regional comprehensive plans; and,
- qualifications for hearing officers and the rules and procedures for hearings.
- Assisting ISBE in developing evaluations and reporting on data to the United States Secretary of Education.
- Advising ISBE in developing corrective action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Advising ISBE and local education agencies regarding educational programs and materials that may be provided to children with disabilities to enable them to fully exercise their constitutional and legal rights and entitlements as citizens, including those afforded under the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the Illinois Human Rights Act.
- Advising ISBE in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.
- Comment publicly on rules and regulations proposed by the State regarding the education of children with disabilities and the procedures for distribution of funds.

## MISSION STATEMENT

*The role of the Illinois State Advisory Council on the Education of Children with Disabilities is to be a proactive body, advising the Governor, Legislature and State Board of Education on current issues relating to the education of children and youth with disabilities, as well as the unmet needs of these children and their families. It is also the responsibility of this Council to encourage new strategies and technologies, while advocating high standards of excellence throughout Illinois.*

## PRIMARY ISAC ACTIVITIES

- Joint Agreement Withdrawal
- Commenting on Rules and Regulations
- Providing input on Continuous Improvement Plan
- Due Process and General Supervision input
- Serving on other assignments/committees
- Development of an Annual Report
- Providing guidance on state rules
- Implementing IDEIA



*McHenry County students/self-advocates at the Capitol.*

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**Thank You!**