ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

ISBE *Weekly*

A concise roundup of important education news, guidance, funding updates, and tools to support schools, districts, and student success

July 28, 2026

Busy Signal: A New State Law Will Make Illinois Classrooms Cellphone-Free

Dear Colleagues:

This morning, I had the honor of attending a special ceremony where Gov. JB Pritzker signed into law Senate Bill 2427, banning cellphones and other portable devices in Illinois classrooms. Participating in this event allowed me to once again thank Gov. Pritzker for his steadfast leadership in this effort to minimize distractions and maximize learning, safety, and healthy social interactions in our schools. Having the signing ceremony in Elgin, the home of State Sen. Cristina Castro, acknowledged the efforts that she and Rep. Michelle Mussman undertook in sponsoring the bill and bringing together education partners to shape this important legislation.

Details about the bill you will want to know: By Sept. 1, ISBE will share a model policy that you can use to help kickstart your district's development of the policy that's just right for your schools by the time the law takes effect in the 2027-28 school year. I encourage districts to start earlier. Each district's policy must prohibit the use of wireless communication devices during instructional time, but provide for safe and accessible storage, and set reasonable consequences for students who violate the rules (no fines, fees, suspensions, expulsions, or deployment of school resource officers). Devices covered by the ban include not only cellphones but also smartwatches, smart glasses, gaming devices, and personal laptops or tablets (district-issued devices are exempt). Policies must provide exemptions for emergencies, medical needs, and for English learners or students with Individualized Education Programs or 504 Plans whose devices are integral to their accommodations.

Here are a few facts for students and families to know: Illinois is joining a growing trend. At least 35 states already have cellphone bans, and at least 25 have "bell-to-bell" bans like Illinois. This new legislation was bipartisan and overwhelmingly popular. Students will not be disconnected from family, as schools must provide a phone students can use to contact their parents. Schools can also provide exemptions for students who are responsible for the well-being of a family member.

Many districts have already adopted cellphone bans, and in those schools, educators have noticed several unforeseen side effects. Hallways have become much noisier, as students socialize between classes, and some students play Uno or board games in the lunchroom. Schools have reported seeing a huge uptick in the number of books checked out of the library. There have even been reports of students committing important phone numbers to memory. Of course, the ultimate goal is for the cellphone bans to lead to academic growth and limit distractions.

Where cellphones are stored during instructional time is the key decision each district needs to make. The options range from building-wide bans, storing phones in lockers, or classroom pouches or pockets. Studies suggest that — after an initial adjustment period — the most effective location is whatever is farthest away. Be watching for the model policy we will send in the next few weeks. I encourage you to develop the details of your policy in consultation with your educators, families, relevant collective bargaining units, and students.

Here's to a brighter future!

All my best,

Tony

Dr. Tony Sanders
State Superintendent of Education

Photo of the Week



State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders joined Gov. JB Pritzker, state legislators, and School District U-46 officials at the ceremonial signing of Illinois' new law limiting student cellphone use in school.

Dates and Deadlines

- **07/29/2026** (1-2 p.m.) **:** Multilingual/Language Development Virtual Open Office Hours
- **08/03/2026** (5 p.m.) **:** Deadline to submit FY 2027 Computer Science Equity Grant applications
- **08/04/2026** (10-11 a.m.) **:** Illinois' New Social and Emotional Learning Standards webinar
- **08/04/2026** (10-10:30 a.m.) **:** Illinois Comprehensive Numeracy Plan Virtual Office Hours
- **08/04/2026** (10:30-11:30 a.m.) **:** Multilingual/Language Development Virtual Open Office Hours
- **08/05/2026** (1-2 p.m.) **:** Multilingual/Language Development Open Virtual Office Hours
- **08/07/2026 :** Illinois Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday
- **08/10/2026** (3-4 p.m.) **:** ISBE Artificial Intelligence Guidance for Illinois School Districts webinar
- **08/11/2026** (10:30-11:30 a.m.) **:** Multilingual/Language Development Virtual Open Office Hours
- **08/11/2026** (10-10:30 a.m.) **:** Illinois Comprehensive Numeracy Plan Virtual Office Hours

More Dates and Deadlines

Latest News

Finance

Annual Financial Report Form Available

The fiscal year 2026 School District/Joint Agreement Annual Financial Report (AFR) form is now available. Note: The AFR on the website has been updated to correct the page numbers. The ISBE Web Application Security (IWAS) School District Financial Reports system will begin accepting FY 2026 submissions on **Aug. 15**.

The AFR must be submitted by the auditor through the IWAS system no later than **Oct. 15**. If any AFRs will be submitted after Oct. 15, auditors should provide ISBE with a list of impacted entities and approximate submission dates by emailing finance1@isbe.net or submitting a comment for each in the IWAS system.

Once ISBE has accepted the FY 2026 AFR, the district superintendents and joint agreement directors will electronically confirm/sign the ISBE Accepted AFR in the IWAS system through the AFR Confirmation Process. Additionally, the district is required to submit a corrective action plan when any of the findings 1-14 are checked on the auditor's questionnaire page. Instructions can be found on ISBE's Annual Financial Report webpage under the Forms tab.

Contact School Business Services at 217-785-8779 or finance1@isbe.net with questions.

In Brief

Join the Environmental Education Association of Illinois Regional Roundtable and Social Session

Join the Environmental Education Association of Illinois on **Aug. 17** for a day of learning, networking, and outdoor adventure along the Illinois River. Participants will learn about regional natural history and take a two-hour guided hike at Starved Rock State Park. Register for the Environmental Education and Regional Natural History Roundtable and Social Session.

Inspire Action and Optimism with the Environmental Education Associations of Illinois and Indiana

Join the Environmental Education Associations of Illinois and Indiana on **Sept. 15** in Porter, Indiana, for a day of professional development based on activities from Project WET, Project WILD, and Project Learning Tree. This national curriculum supplement focuses on water, animals, and trees and includes activities for K-12 students. There will also be time to explore area resource providers and to network with others who teach in the region. Lunch, snacks, and continuing education credits will be provided. Space is limited. Registration for Environmental Education to Inspire Action and Optimism is open until **Sept. 8** or until capacity is reached.

Save on Back-to-School Essentials During Illinois' Sales Tax Holiday Aug. 7-16

As families prepare for the start of a new school year, Illinois is offering an opportunity to save on essential school supplies, including clothing and footwear. During the Illinois Back-to-School Sales Tax Holiday, **Aug. 7-16**, the sales tax will be reduced on qualifying school-related items. Help spread the word by sharing this information with families and students.

Sign Up for the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest Professional Learning Series

Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, is offering a free virtual professional learning series for Grades 5 and 6 math teachers on evidence-based fractions instruction. The Engaging

Students in Fractions Learning series will run from September through November and includes eight weekly interactive virtual sessions. Complete the Engaging Students in Fractions Learning series interest form to sign up. Email Max Pardo at mpardo@air.org with questions.

In Case You Missed It

Wellness & Student Care

Register for Illinois' New Social and Emotional Learning Standards Webinar

The new Illinois Social and Emotional Learning Standards reflect a renewed commitment to equity, whole child development, and the well-being of all students. Join us **Aug. 4 from 10-11 a.m.** for an engaging webinar that explores the new standards and introduces the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards Toolkit that is designed to support implementation. Whether you're a district leader, school administrator, or educator, this session will help connect the standards to everyday practice and provide tools to support SEL implementation. Register for Illinois' New Social and Emotional Learning Standards webinar.

ISBE Streamlines Undesignated Medication Reporting Forms

As of July 1, ISBE consolidated its separate reporting forms for undesignated epinephrine, opioid antagonists, and asthma medications into a single online Undesignated Medication Use Reporting Form. The new form, which can be found on ISBE's School Nursing webpage, includes medication-specific questions, standardized response options, and enhanced data collection features, including eliminating write-in responses. Schools must continue to report administration of these medications within three days, as required by Illinois School Code (105 ILCS 5/22-30). Learn more about the changes and reporting requirements in the July 2026 Updates to ISBE Undesignated Medication Reporting Form supporting document. Additional training will be provided at the 2026 School Nurse Bootcamp on **Aug. 18**. Contact SchoolNurse@isbe.net with questions.

Funding Available to Attend 2026 National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference

ISBE is providing funding for local homeless liaisons and school district staff to attend the 2026 National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth Conference, **Oct. 31-Nov. 3** in Nashville, Tennessee. Districts may receive up to $3,000 per participant for staff members whose work includes supporting students experiencing homelessness. Funds are limited and will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Interested districts are encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Email homeless@isbe.net with questions.

Join Our Team

- Network Administrator (Senior Systems Administrator #1356)
- Special Education Supervisor #1604
- Web Developer (Principal Consultant #1081, 1920)

See all job postings.