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

September 29, 2026

Guest Column: As a Student, Here's What I Want Adults to Know About AI

Dear Illinois Educators:

Being a student in Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202, I've seen firsthand how students balance extracurricular activities, clubs, and sports. Coming home to a mountain of schoolwork after a long day raises a tough question: Do you use shortcuts to get homework done quickly for a good night's sleep, or do you push through a tiresome study session and end up groggy in class the next day?

High school students across Illinois find themselves with the power of the internet and artificial intelligence at their fingertips. For some students, the lure of perfect grades acts as a counterproductive motive to misuse AI, causing a reduction in the percentage of students maintaining their academic integrity. To learn is to endure a necessary friction. It is in the uncomfortable space of not knowing, of wrestling with a blank page or a complex equation, that the intellect stretches and grows. Yet, a new, quiet trend, disguised as efficiency, is sweeping through our schools. In our current education system, a student can easily earn top grades and maintain a perfect GPA without ever building the skills necessary to succeed. While education serves many purposes, one of its most important goals is helping students develop the critical thinking, creativity, and judgment they need to navigate an increasingly complex world.

AI is advancing every day, and trying to place a limit on its exponential growth would be to no avail. While some of my teachers ban generative AI completely, others teach us to use it responsibly as a tool, which, in my opinion, is the most effective approach. In my work with the Illinois State Board of Education's Student Advisory Council on technology use and AI, I facilitated student groups at the second annual Student Summit at the University of Illinois Springfield. My job was to gather input on how students actually view and use artificial intelligence. The message that kept resurfacing was the need to educate students on the correct and incorrect ways to use these tools. When I asked, "Raise your hand if you know at least five students who use AI on schoolwork or exams," every single hand in every group went up. Seeing that uniform sea of raised hands would break some educators' hearts, but it perfectly exemplifies why we must work alongside technology instead of running from it.

Every student can benefit from AI literacy. Handing teenagers powerful technology without explicit guidance leads to confusion and the potential for technology misuse. That's why ISBE released statewide AI Guidance focusing on responsible use, human relationships, privacy, equity, and digital citizenship — rather than outright bans. The guidance is designed to help schools equip students to use AI responsibly and understand its limits and risks. Teachers should support responsible and informed use by clearly communicating their district's expectations for how AI and other tools may be used with each assignment.

To achieve the goal found in the guidance, schools need a clear and consistent approach to assignments that honors the four core tenets of the AI Guidance. A specific strategy I have seen utilized successfully by teachers is the traffic light system. A red light prohibits AI entirely to evaluate authentic human reasoning on foundational tasks, essays, and

diagnostics. A yellow light allows AI for brainstorming, outlining, or grammar checks while keeping the core work original. A green light encourages full AI collaboration, such as drafting, grammar checking, or research, provided that students submit their prompts and check AI output for accuracy.

Despite my awareness of the potential benefits of AI, I did not use AI in the message I am conveying to you, and I most certainly would not undermine the societal need for a generation that can think critically, evaluate truth, and use powerful tools responsibly. I appreciate the opportunity to lend my voice to this effort as a student advocate for authentic learning.

At your service,

Miranda Moreno-Balderas

Miranda Moreno-Balderas is a junior at Plainfield South High School and a second-year Student Advisory Council member. She is a member of District 202's Student Advisory Council, her school's student council, Key Club, and STEM Club. She is completing her associate degree at Joliet Junior College while also taking courses at Northwestern University for business law.

Photo of the Week



Back-to-school season brought out the biggest smiles in Fremont School District 79 — which serves parts of Hawthorn Woods, Grayslake, Libertyville, Long Grove, Mundelein, Round Lake, and Wauconda. Families gathered for the annual meet and greet event, where this older sister made sure her sibling was looking picture-perfect for the celebration.

Dates and Deadlines

- **10/01/2026 :** Deadline to submit fiscal year 2027 National Board Component Subsidy applications
- **10/01/2026** (All Day) **:** Nominations due for Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year awards
- **10/02/2026** (5 p.m.) **:** Deadline to submit 2026-27 United States Senate Youth Program applications
- **10/05/2026** (1-4 p.m.) **:** FY 2028 ISBE budget hearing (virtual)
- **10/06/2026** (10-11:30 a.m.) **:** 2026 Report Card Overview webinar
- **10/07/2026** (2-3 p.m.) **:** Sun Meals To-Go 101 webinar
- **10/09/2026** (All Day) **:** Deadline to submit National Board Certified Teachers Intent to Mentor applications
- **10/12/2026 :** ISBE offices closed for Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples' Day
- **10/12/2026 :** National School Lunch Week

- **10/13/2026** (All Day) **:** Deadline for schools and districts to apply for the federal DEPEND nutrition grant

More Dates and Deadlines

Latest News

Data Strategies & Analytics

2026 Illinois Report Card Open Forum No. 2

Join us for the 2026 Illinois Report Card Open Forum No. 2 webinar on **Oct. 15 from 10-11:30 a.m.** This webinar will briefly cover important dates and tools for understanding your district's final Report Card data. It will also provide an open forum for questions and answers related to the Report Card.

Finance

Ed-Flex Waiver Request – FY 2027 Application Window Now Open

The fiscal year 2027 Ed-Flex Waiver Request submission window is now open. Applications may be submitted via the Ed-Flex Waiver Request survey in IWAS. Superintendents receive automatic access to the survey. Other staff members may request access in IWAS, which must be approved by the superintendent. All FY 2027 applications are due no later than **Nov. 13**. Please note that any public comments received by the district must be uploaded in the application survey.

The FY 2028 submission window will be open **Dec. 1** through **Jan. 31, 2027**. Guidance materials and application templates are available on the Title Grant Administration webpage. Questions may be submitted to EdFlex@isbe.net

FY 2028 Budget Hearings

ISBE invites school leaders and classroom teachers to give their input on state funding for public education in FY 2028. In addition to receiving budget requests using an online form, ISBE will hold three public hearings to hear public testimony: **Oct. 5** (virtual), **Oct. 21** (Springfield), and **Nov. 5** (virtual).

The input ISBE receives will inform the Board's advocacy for equitable funding for all students in FY 2028 and provide the basis for ISBE's budget recommendation to the governor and General Assembly in January 2027. Testimony at past hearings has led to increased investments in Evidence-Based Funding, Mandated Categoricals, and more.

To submit a written testimony request, complete the Written Testimony Form by **Nov. 5**. Please note that this form must be submitted before registering to speak. ISBE will give equal consideration to both written and oral testimony.

On the form, you'll be asked to indicate whether you plan to attend one of the hearings. If you are attending the in-person hearing on Oct. 21, selecting that date will confirm your attendance, and no additional registration is required. However, if you plan to attend one of the virtual hearings, you will need to complete a separate registration form to receive the webinar link. Registration links for the virtual hearings are provided below.

- Register for the Oct. 5 virtual budget hearing
- Register for the Nov. 5 virtual budget hearing

The form, along with additional details, is available on the ISBE Budget Information webpage.

Leadership

Thomas Lay Burroughs Award Nominations Open

Named in honor of former State Board of Education Chairman Tom Burroughs, the annual Burroughs Award recognizes exemplary school board members whose leadership has advanced educational excellence and equity.

The criteria for this award recognize the following three areas of accomplishment:

- Personal leadership in improving student learning, closing achievement gaps, and supporting educational excellence; and/or
- Personal leadership in expanding educational opportunities for underserved students; and/or
- Personal leadership in resolving a crisis or major difficulty with the result of more equitable outcomes for students.

If you have a board member who has provided outstanding leadership in one or more of these areas, we hope you will submit a nomination for the 2026 Burroughs Award by the close of business on **Oct. 16**.

Nutrition

DEPEND Program: Apply for Federal Funding

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the National Institutes of Health are launching a new project called Defining Evidence for Programs to Ensure Nutrition for Development (DEPEND).

DEPEND is designed to generate credible, transferable evidence about how schools can improve meal quality in ways that can be sustained over time. DEPEND will fund projects that test strategies to provide healthier meals that students choose and consume. Eligible applicants for school-based demonstration projects include public schools, public charter schools, public school districts, and school food authorities. Applications are due **Oct. 13**, and decisions are anticipated **Oct. 23**. Apply for the DEPEND program now.

Celebrate National School Lunch Week

National School Lunch Week is set for **Oct. 12-16**. President John F. Kennedy created National School Lunch Week in 1962; read the original proclamation on The American Presidency Project website. This year's theme, as organized by the School Nutrition Association (SNA), is "Cafeteria Circus." Go to the SNA website for resources and to learn more. Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) School Lunch Materials webpage to download or order free tools to celebrate the special week.

Highlights include The Real Food Guide to School Lunch for Families, which was recently updated. This fact sheet is great for showing families the nutritious components of a school lunch. Other USDA Team Nutrition resources include thank you cards that students can give to school nutrition professionals, posters, and more.

Standards & Instruction

ISBE Releases Numeracy Plan Companion Resource

ISBE has released a companion resource to support the implementation of the Illinois Comprehensive Numeracy Plan (ICNP): The Curriculum Evaluation Tool Mathematics Addendum. This resource is designed to provide additional context and assist districts and schools in planning for local implementation.

A Microsoft Form has been created to collect feedback from the field regarding additional ICNP resources. This form provides educational partners with a direct line to the Numeracy Team to share feedback, questions, resource needs, and ideas, and may be completed as often as needed. This form will be located on the Numeracy Plan webpage.

Visit the Illinois Comprehensive Numeracy Plan webpage to view the plan and resources, access office hours, and sign up to receive ICNP updates, including upcoming implementation resources and opportunities to engage in statewide numeracy efforts.

Wellness & Student Care

SY 2026-27 FitnessGram Reporting Opens Oct. 15

Illinois requires students in Grades 3-12 to complete the FitnessGram annual fitness assessment and schools to report results for Grades 5, 7, and 10 to ISBE through the Student Health Data – Physical Fitness system in IWAS. School year 2026-27 reporting opens **Oct. 15** and closes **June 30, 2027**.

FitnessGram measures:

- Aerobic capacity (PACER test or mile run test for Grades 4-12)
- Muscular strength (push-ups)
- Muscular endurance (curl-ups)
- Flexibility (sit-and-reach test or trunk lift test)

If you need help getting started, ISBE's Enhanced Physical Education webpage includes a program overview, the FitnessGram Best Practices guide that walks through test administration, and the IWAS Electronic Submission User Guide that covers data entry. For students with disabilities, the Brockport Physical Fitness Test is an adaptive assessment that works in conjunction with FitnessGram. See ISBE's Brockport FAQ for guidance.

FitnessGram remains the tool districts use to meet physical fitness assessment requirements. Contact Roger Seitzinger at rseitzin@isbe.net with questions.

Date Changes to IWAS Student Health Data Collections

The opening date for the IWAS Student Health Data collections for immunization and eye exam has changed for the 2026-27 school year. Both collections will open **Oct. 15**, consistent with the dates established in 105 ILCS 5/22-105. The Student Health Data – Immunization collection will close **Nov. 15**, and the Student Health Data – Eye Exam collection will close **June 30, 2027**. The Student Health Data – Dental collection timeline has not changed and will open **May 15, 2027**, and close **June 30, 2027**.

Schools and districts are strongly encouraged to add these dates to their calendars and set reminders several weeks before each collection closes. Many schools and districts are required to report student health data. When a large number of entities attempt to enter data on the final reporting day, users may experience slower application performance or difficulties submitting their data. Submitting data well in advance of the deadline can help avoid these issues. Contact SchoolNurse@isbe.net with questions.

New Resources Available on Problem Gambling and Digital Gaming Risks

ISBE has added new resources on problem gambling and digital gaming risks to the Substance Use and Gambling Disorder Prevention and Recovery Instruction Resource Guide, in accordance with Public Act 104-0626. These resources are designed to support educators, school personnel, students, and families with evidence-informed guidance and instructional materials. Users can easily search and filter resources by grade level and resource type, including fact sheets, presentations, and other educational tools, to quickly find materials that best meet their needs. For assistance accessing the resource guide or for questions, contact SchoolNurse@isbe.net.

In Brief

Making Connections Webinar

Join Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Fellows at Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, **Oct. 13 from 3:30-4:30 p.m.**, for Making Connections — a webinar for educators who play a key role in the life trajectory of children. Participants will discuss risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors, including psychiatric diagnoses, social and psychological factors,

and strategies for addressing suicidal thoughts and behaviors when these arise in a school setting. Educators will have the opportunity to ask questions and may be eligible to receive professional development credit hours. Register for the Making Connections webinar.

Join the Environmental Education Association of Illinois' Earth Force

Join the Environmental Education Association of Illinois **Oct. 23** in Sparta for a training on the Earth Force process. Training on this six-step process prepares educators to lead youth in environmental civic action that helps them connect classroom learning to issues in their community and make a difference. This free training includes lunch, professional development credit hours, and access to online materials. Learn more and register online for the Environmental Education Association of Illinois' Earth Force training.

Register for the Second Annual First Gen Symposium

Register to join the Illinois Student Assistance Commission at the Second Annual First Gen Symposium **Nov. 5 from 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.** at Waubonsee Community College in Sugar Grove. The deadline to register is **Oct. 30**, or until full capacity has been reached. Space is limited. The $25 registration fee includes continental breakfast and lunch. Advance registration is required. Walk-in registration is not available. For more information and the latest updates, visit the First Gen Symposium webpage. Email ISAC.OutreachTraining@illinois.gov with questions.

2026-27 United States Senate Youth Program

Applications are now open for the United States Senate Youth Program for the 65th annual Washington Week to be held **March 6-13, 2027**.

The United States Senate Youth Program is a unique educational experience for outstanding high school seniors and juniors interested in pursuing careers in public service. Two student delegates plus a first and second alternate will be designated by the chief school officer from each state, the District of Columbia, and Department of Defense Education Activity by Dec. 1. The students will meet their peers from across the nation, be immersed in a premier leadership experience, and receive a $12,500 undergraduate college scholarship in the name of the U.S. Senate. The program encourages outstanding young people in our country to become leaders in government and public service.

The application deadline is **5 p.m. on Oct. 2**. To learn more and download the application, visit the ISBE United States Senate Youth Program webpage. Contact ussyp@isbe.net or 217-782-5270 with questions.

Bring the Illinois Mobile Museum of Tolerance to Your School

The Illinois Mobile Museum of Tolerance (IL MMOT) brings interactive, educational programming directly to Illinois schools at no cost. The mobile museum provides students in Grades 5-12 with an engaging opportunity to explore topics including combating hate and bias, empathy, tolerance, and human rights. The IL MMOT is available to visit schools throughout Illinois and can accommodate programming that complements classroom learning and supports meaningful student engagement. Illinois schools interested in bringing the Mobile Museum of Tolerance to their students are encouraged to contact the IL MMOT to learn more about programming and availability.

IAASE Annual Conference for Educators

Illinois education leaders are invited to join Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education (IAASE) **Oct. 22-23** in Rosemont for two energizing days of ideas, strategies, and connections that strengthen leadership across every school community. Hear Beth Z turn technology and AI into practical productivity tools, and discover Jessica Minahan's proactive, skill-building approaches to student behavior and mental health. Choose from more than 40 timely breakout sessions, connect with education leaders statewide, and close with a powerhouse panel of leading Illinois special education attorneys.

Bring your team, expand your thinking, and return ready to lead with greater confidence, clarity, and impact. Register your team for the IAASE Annual Conference today.

Register for the Illinois Education & Technology Conference

The Illinois Education & Technology Conference (IETC) returns to Springfield **Nov. 11-13**, bringing together educators and school leaders from across Illinois for three days of professional learning, collaboration, and networking. More than 150 sessions and workshops will explore topics including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, instructional technology, leadership, digital literacy, accessibility, and emerging technologies. IETC is designed for K-12 teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, library and media specialists, IT professionals, and technology leaders. Learn more, explore the schedule, and register on the Illinois Education & Technology Conference webpage.

Illinois Technical Assistance Projects Fall Virtual Institute

The 3rd Annual Illinois Technical Assistance Projects Fall Virtual Institute on **Oct. 9** will feature practical, strategy-focused sessions for educators who support students with Individualized Education Programs. Educators can customize their professional learning by choosing the sessions that best meet their needs. Attend one session or stay for all six and earn up to six professional development hours. Explore all sessions and presenters in the Illinois Technical Assistance Projects Fall Virtual Institute Schedule-at-a-Glance. Register for the Illinois Technical Assistance Projects Fall Virtual Institute.

Take the AI Illinois Challenge

The Learning Technology Center invites Illinois educators to participate in the AI Illinois Challenge — either by forming a team of students in Grades 6-12 or competing individually in an educator track. Educators can coach teams of up to four students, and no prior AI, coding, or technical experience is required. Student teams can participate at the level that fits them best, from developing and presenting an AI-powered idea in the proposal track to designing and building a working solution in the technical/implementation track. Educators can also compete on their own in one of two tracks: Teach AI Concepts or Transformative Teaching. The interest form for this year's challenge is due **Oct. 9**. Learn more on the AI Illinois Challenge webpage.

Brigham Young University Hosts Cybersecurity Capture the Flag Competition

Brigham Young University invites high school students to their virtual Cybersecurity Capture the Flag Competition on **Oct 16-17**. Participants will learn about cybersecurity techniques as they crack secret codes, find hidden clues, and test their computer knowledge. The competition includes challenges for all skill levels.

In Case You Missed It

Data Strategies & Analytics

Register for the 2026 Report Card Overview Webinar

Join ISBE on **Oct. 6 from 10-11:30 a.m**. to review all new elements on the 2026 Report Card and walk through the Educator Preview tool. Staff will also be available to answer questions. The webinar will be recorded and posted on the ISBE Webinars webpage. Register for the 2026 Report Card Overview webinar.

Educator Effectiveness

Apply for National Board Certification Financial Support by Oct. 1

ISBE is accepting applications for fiscal year 2027 National Board Component Subsidies until **Oct. 1**. Eligible Illinois educators pursuing or maintaining National Board Certification through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) may receive financial support through the component subsidy to help cover certification costs. Funding is awarded on a first-come, first-served basis and is subject to availability. Please share this information with

teachers and school counselors who may be interested in pursuing National Board Certification. Visit the ISBE National Board Component Subsidies webpage for more information. Contact NationalBoard@isbe.net with questions.

ISBE Accepting National Board Intent to Mentor Applications

ISBE is accepting Intent to Mentor applications from National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) interested in supporting candidates through mentoring and cohort facilitation during the 2026-27 school year. Compensation may be available for eligible NBCTs who provide mentoring and professional development. Mentoring provides NBCTs with the opportunity to share their expertise, support candidates throughout the certification process, and help strengthen educator excellence across Illinois. Eligibility requirements are available on the ISBE National Board Certified Teachers webpage under the Current National Board Certified Teachers drop-down menu. Applications are due **Oct. 9**. Contact NationalBoard@isbe.net with questions.

Leadership

2027 Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Nominations Close Oct. 1

Now is your chance to nominate an outstanding educator. Nominations for the Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year awards are due by **Oct. 1** for the nominee to be considered for the 2027 award cycle. Nominations can be submitted via the Educator Recommendation Form on ISBE's Elevating Educators webpage. Nominations are accepted from educators, administrators, and community members, and there is no limit to how many nominations an individual, school, or district can submit.

Don't Miss Dr. Sanders' Next Fireside Chat With Bestselling Author Damon West

Join Dr. Tony Sanders on **Nov. 10** for an engaging fireside chat that explores the powerful ideas behind "The Coffee Bean" and the real-life experiences that shaped them. Bestselling author and public speaker Damon West will share how his life changed after injuries ended his college football career and a series of destructive choices led to a lengthy prison sentence. Hear how he found purpose, overcame adversity, and turned his experiences into a force for positive change. You won't want to miss this inspiring conversation. Reserve your spot for the Fireside Chat with Damon West.

Wellness & Student Care

School Nurse Bootcamp Recordings and Continuing Education Available

ISBE and the Illinois Department of Public Health welcomed nearly 700 attendees to the School Nurse Bootcamp last month. Surveys have been sent to all participants to facilitate continuing education/professional development credit. If you have not received your survey, please contact SchoolNurse@isbe.net. Presentation slides will be posted soon on the ISBE School Nursing webpage under the "School Nurse Bootcamp" drop-down menu. All session recordings are available through the PD+ Activity: 2026 School Nurse Bootcamp Recording in the Educator Licensure Information System. Participants who complete the recorded training may receive eligible continuing education or professional development credit. Email SchoolNurse@isbe.net with questions.

Join Our Team

- Administrative Assistant III
- Datawarehouse Lead
- Network Administrator

See all job postings.