

ISBE'S WEEKLY MESSAGE

November 21, 2023

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Dear Colleagues:

Happy Thanksgiving! I am so thankful for the opportunity to work with such talented and dedicated people at the Illinois State Board of Education and in all of Illinois' schools and districts. Serving as the Illinois state superintendent of education is truly my dream job. Since starting this role in February, I have had the honor of traveling all across the state, meeting and speaking with teachers and administrators at hundreds of events. I am immensely grateful for the warm welcome I have received and for the collaboration and thought partnership you have extended to support the development of the agency's next Strategic Plan and the advancement of our current priorities.

In the nine months since I joined ISBE, we have already accomplished a lot. We hired new Chief of Staff Kimako Patterson, who ensures our daily operations and management run smoothly. We also hired new Chief Information Officer Edobor Efam. I am so excited for him to join the team and to begin mapping out updates to internal and external systems that ISBE and school districts use. We are also excited to welcome Ann Whalen to the ISBE team as our chief adviser to early childhood transition. She leads the state's efforts to unite early childhood care and education services and programs into one new state agency. We also hired Dr. Matt Seaton as our chief finance officer and promoted Kristen Kennedy as chief legal officer.

In October, we had our first in-person All Agency Meeting since before the pandemic, bringing all ISBE staff together from the offices in Chicago and Springfield and creating the opportunity for many people to meet face-to-face for the very first time. We had ISBE employees at the meeting who had been with us for less than a week and others who were celebrating 30 years at our agency, including the following, whom I would like to thank for their decades of dedication and service:

- Pam Bokamp – Facility Management
- Robert Onyewuchi – Federal and State Monitoring
- Ruth "Ann" Plogger (now retired) – Technology Support and Infrastructure
- Susan Fore – Fiscal Support Services
- Janice Thornhill – Technology Support and Infrastructure

Last week, we closed public comment on the second draft of the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan, which, once finalized by January 31, 2024, will open a new chapter in English language arts instruction in Illinois. I am grateful to all the ISBE team members who have worked incredibly hard developing the plan and to everyone who has provided us feedback on the first and second drafts.

There is so much knowledge among our ISBE family and I am incredibly excited for the work ahead, utilizing all the talent in our agency and in the field for the betterment of students in Illinois.

Happy Thanksgiving to each of you and I hope you get to enjoy this holiday among your loved ones.

Pictured: Happy Thanksgiving from Harper, a therapy dog in Pekin Community High School District 303!

All my best,

Tony

DATES AND DEADLINES

Please note this is not a complete list of events, meetings, and deadlines. For more events and details, visit the ISBE Calendar page (<https://www.isbe.net/Pages/ISBE-Meetings.aspx>).

Nov. 23-24	ISBE offices closed
Nov. 28	Webinar: FY 2024 School Improvement Planning Grant Application for schools newly designated Targeted, Comprehensive, or Intensive (https://register.gotowebinar.com/rt/5163291644876376156)
Nov. 28	ACCESS testing: Student records become active in WIDA AMS
Nov. 29	Webinar: FY 2024 School Improvement Planning Grant Application for schools newly designated Targeted, Comprehensive, or Intensive (https://register.gotowebinar.com/rt/5163291644876376156)
Dec. 1	Deadline to submit the National Career Clusters® Framework National Implementation Survey (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVwkhlp4Ugk)
Dec. 1	Deadline to FY 2024 School Maintenance Project Grant applications (https://www.isbe.net/Pages/School-Maintenance-Project-Grant.aspx)
Dec. 5	Deadline to apply for Arts and Foreign Language Education Planning Assistance Grant (https://arts.illinois.gov/afl)
Dec. 5-7	Multilingual Illinois 2023 Statewide Conference (https://irc.thecenterweb.org/events/essa-conference)
Dec. 8	Seventh Annual Mastering KIDS Summit (Tinley Park) (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdcqudlccTst9c9vXOViVgSRfeyeP4JM5Ga6yOHohRhHPPsfQ/viewform)
Dec. 13	Seventh Annual Mastering KIDS Summit (Carbondale) (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdcqudlccTst9c9vXOViVgSRfeyeP4JM5Ga6yOHohRhHPPsfQ/viewform)
Dec. 13	College Board Webinar: Introduction to AP Seminar: English and AP Precalculus (https://collegeboard.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2DuUI2X5Seq27_IlvXhSYA#/registration)
Dec. 15	Annual Statement of Affairs due (https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Annual-Statement-of-Affairs.aspx)
Dec. 18	Deadline to apply for National School Lunch Program Equipment Assistance Grants (https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Equipment-Grants.aspx)
Dec. 22	Deadline to apply for the Illinois Green Ribbon Schools Award (https://illinoisgreenalliance.org/green-ribbon-schools/)

Dec. 25	ISBE offices closed
Dec. 26	Certificate of Tax Levy due (https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Certificate-of-Tax-Levy.aspx)
Jan. 1, 2024	ISBE offices closed
Jan. 2, 2024	Paper ACCESS testing materials arrive in schools and districts
Jan. 5, 2024	Deadline to send Illinois Arts Education Week Poster Contest entries (https://www.isbe.net/artcontest)
Jan. 8, 2024	Evidence-Based Funding Property Tax Relief Grant applications due (https://www.isbe.net/proptaxrelief)
Jan. 9, 2024	Deadline for students to submit artwork for National Association of State Aviation Officials contest (https://nasao.org/page/international-aviation-art-contest)
Jan. 15, 2024	Deadline to apply for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Presidential Innovation Awards for Environmental Educators (https://www.epa.gov/education/presidential-innovation-award-environmental-educators#about)
Jan. 19, 2024	Deadline to apply for Illinois National Board Maintenance of Certification Fee Subsidy (https://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/renew/)
Jan. 19, 2024	Deadline to apply for Illinois National Board Retake Candidate Fee Subsidy (https://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/candidates/retake/)
Jan. 20, 2024	First day for NBCTs to apply for new \$4,000 incentive awarded on a first-come, first-served basis (https://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/4k-incentive/)
Jan. 30, 2024	Deadline to submit proposals for the Career Connections Conference (https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Career-Connections-Conference.aspx)
Jan. 31, 2024	Deadline to apply for U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean School Bus Grant Program (https://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus)
Feb. 20, 2024	Illinois Social Emotional Learning Conference
Feb. 23, 2024	Deadline to apply for National Board Certified Teacher Intent to Mentor (https://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/mentor/)
Mar. 1-2, 2024	Illinois Teacher Leadership Summit (https://sites.google.com/view/ilteacherleadershipsummit/home)
Mar. 11-15, 2024	42nd annual Illinois Arts Education Week (https://www.isbe.net/artcontest)
Mar. 29, 2024	Deadline to apply for NBCT incentive grant (https://nbrc.illinoisstate.edu/4k-incentive/)
May 18, 2024	Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Awards Banquet
June 18, 2024	ISBE Career Connection Conference

NEW

LEARNING RENEWAL

Each week this section will focus on the learning renewal that is taking place in Illinois schools. We invite you to share how you are investing federal relief funds (<https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=hv5kA8ZJ9Eq1LDNameV30Ufi4KgH87ICv6FRRQI8cvIUNTdHWktDS1NJWjJZVDFaQ09RVINCUVdMRi4u>) to help students recover.

FROM RELIEF TO RESILIENCE: ILLINOIS SCHOOLS MAKING STRIDES IN PANDEMIC RECOVERY

In the quest to understand best practices in learning recovery amidst the pandemic's turbulence, the education community found itself in a unique position—crafting solutions while in flight, akin to building a plane while navigating the skies. Much like engineers building mid-flight, educators and districts in Illinois are actively exploring and implementing strategies to foster learning recovery while simultaneously unraveling what works best.

Launching next week, our series "From Relief to Resilience" will illuminate success stories, unveiling how Illinois school districts harnessed federal relief funds—from setting ambitious goals to implementing new strategies and sustaining programs. Illinois districts have not only navigated the challenges posed by the pandemic but have emerged stronger, more innovative, and deeply committed to shaping a brighter future for every learner.

Efforts to understand learning recovery best practices remain ongoing and hold significant implications for the future. Understanding these strategies not only aids in navigating current challenges but also equips school leaders with invaluable insights for the post-pandemic landscape, especially as relief funds eventually expire. In October, EdSystems hosted a webinar titled "Lessons Learned from Learning Renewal Efforts, (<https://edsystemsniu.org/lessons-learned-from-learning-renewal-efforts-webinar/>)" featuring insights from three Illinois school districts, specifically focusing on credit recovery and the impact of high-intensity tutoring. Additionally, a recent research brief from the Illinois Workforce in Education Collaborative (<https://dpi.uillinois.edu/applied-research/iwerc/current-projects/learning-renewal/>) shares success stories from school districts that made significant strides in learning recovery. Notably, the report showcases Creston CCSD 161, where students consistently ranked in the top 25% across all subjects and time periods. Creston achieved this feat through a blend of specialized teacher training, innovative classroom management programs, and fostering peer professional development.

Stay tuned for more inspiring accounts. Does your district have a data-driven success story waiting to be shared? We invite you to contribute by sharing here (<https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=hv5kA8ZJ9Eq1LDNameV30Ufi4KgH87ICv6FRRQI8cvIUNTdHWktDS1NJWjJZVDFaQ09RVINCUVdMRi4u>) or by contacting Lindsay Record at lrecord@isbe.net (<mailto:lrecord@isbe.net>).

NEW

ILLINOIS STUDENT ASSISTANCE COMMISSION

FREE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

You're invited to take advantage of the professional development opportunities offered by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) for counselors, college-access professionals, mentors, and community partners who are assisting students with going to college and the financial aid process. These trainings are provided with no registration fees. Please visit ISAC's Professional Development Webinar Calendar (<https://www.isac.org/pd/webinars.html>) to see a list of topics and dates for online events and to register. Visit ISAC's In-Person Training page (<https://www.isac.org/pd/training-workshops.html>) for information and to register for half-day, in-person financial aid trainings being offered from November through January. We encourage everyone to check back often as new dates and locations will be added as additional trainings are scheduled.

ISAC'S NEW 2024-25 FAFSA INFORMATION WEBPAGE

Implementation of the FAFSA Simplification Act necessitates significant changes in the 2024-25 federal process of requesting financial assistance, resulting in a delay of availability of the 2024-25 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) – now anticipated to launch during December 2023 (rather than in October as it normally does). ISAC has a new webpage specifically created for counselors, mentors, and other college access professionals who may have questions about the new 2024-25 FAFSA. Visit the FAFSA Simplification webpage (<https://www.isac.org/pd/fafsa-simplification>) to see updates, answers to frequently asked questions, and for training opportunities.

COLLEGE CHANGES EVERYTHING CAMPAIGN

As a reminder, ISAC's College Changes Everything® Campaign (<https://www.collegechangeseverything.org/campaign/>) offers schools and community-based organizations the support and resources needed to host financial aid and college application completion workshops. ISACorps™ (<https://www.isac.org/students/before-college/isacorps/>) members are available to help students and families navigate the college and financial aid process. ISAC looks forward to partnering with your school in supporting your students with the college and financial aid application process.

FREE ONLINE RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

We know the fall semester is a busy time of year with postsecondary planning for your students, and ISAC has resources to help you with that work. ISAC College Q&A (<http://www.isac.org/collegeqa>) is a free texting service (in English and in Spanish) that allows students to get their college and financial aid questions answered by ISAC team members. Students also will receive targeted text reminders about college and financial aid deadlines. The ISAC Student Portal (<https://studentportal.isac.org/>) offers free online tools, checklists, and activities to help high school students with postsecondary planning.



APPLY FOR FY 2024 NSLP EQUIPMENT GRANTS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service allocates funds to ISBE for the purpose of providing equipment assistance to eligible School Food Authorities (SFAs) through competitive grants. These grants are intended to support the capacity of SFAs that operate the federally funded National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) by enabling them to meet school food service equipment needs.

A total of \$1,051,731 is available for this funding opportunity. All Illinois SFAs that participate in NSLP are eligible to apply. SFAs may request up to \$50,000 to replace, renovate, or purchase new school food service equipment that is needed for NSLP/SBP operations, and which enables them to serve healthier program meals; improve food safety; and/or support expansion or establishment of the School Breakfast Program.

SFAs may submit project proposals until **4 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 18**.

For full details, see the Notice of Funding Opportunity/Request for Proposals and information on how to apply on the NSLP Equipment Assistance Grant webpage (</Pages/Equipment-Grants.aspx>).

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM EXPANSION GRANT

ISBE will present an informational webinar on the new School Breakfast Program Expansion Grant from **10-11 a.m.**

Dec. 5. Registration for the webinar is underway online [■](#)

(<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/6570536787293354076>).


Illinois is one of only three states awarded the grant opportunity by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. ISBE will be seeking applications early next year from School Food Authorities for sub-grants to initiate or expand the School Breakfast Program (</Pages/School-Breakfast-Program.aspx>).

Email Abbey Johnson at abjohnso@isbe.net (mailto:abjohnso@isbe.net) if you have questions.

NEW

SAFE & HEALTHY CLIMATE

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY'S CLEAN SCHOOL BUS GRANT PROGRAM

Your school district may be eligible for federal funding from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean School Bus grant program. Information about this round of funding can be found here on the Clean School Bus Overview Flyer  (<https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-09/420f23024.pdf>). Applications are due no later than 3 p.m. CST January 31, 2024.

If you would like to learn more about the grant program or view tools and resources for potential applicants, please visit the EPA's Clean School Bus Program (<https://www.epa.gov/cleanschoolbus>) web page.

You are also invited to join the Illinois Clean School Bus Coalition, which hosts monthly meeting to connect school districts, utility companies, non-profits, vendors, and state and federal government groups in a conversation about upgrading school bus fleets. If you would like to join the coalition, please contact Alexis Hosna at hosna.alexis@epa.gov (mailto:hosna.alexis@epa.gov).

NEW

TEACHING & LEARNING

INTRODUCTION TO AP SEMINAR: ENGLISH AND AP PRECALCULUS WEBINAR

Teachers and school leaders are invited to join College Board Advanced Placement (AP) representatives to learn more about two new courses offered in Illinois -- AP Seminar: English and AP Precalculus. This is not only for existing AP districts but is a great starting point for those districts that do not currently offer AP courses. Participants will learn about the content of the courses along with data showing their impact on all students.

Register here for the AP webinar (https://collegeboard.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_2DuUI2X5Seq27_IlvXhSYA), which will be held from **10-11 a.m. Dec. 13**.

FINANCE

FY 2024 ROUND 1 SCHOOL MAINTENANCE PROJECT GRANT

The deadline to submit a fiscal year 2024 School Maintenance Project Grant application is **4 p.m. Dec. 1**. All applicants must submit a grant application through the IWAS system, under Active Grants. Any school district, cooperative high school, Type 40 area vocational center, or special education cooperative may apply for the grant.

This program provides dollar-for-dollar state matching grants of up to \$50,000 exclusively for the maintenance or upkeep of buildings or structures for educational purposes. Ongoing operational costs, including in-house labor for projects not contracted out, cannot be included for any School Maintenance Project Grant.

Visit the School Maintenance Project Grant webpage (</Pages/School-Maintenance-Project-Grant.aspx>) or contact John Runge at 217-785-8779 or SMPG@isbe.net (mailto:SMPG@isbe.net) for detailed information.

IN BRIEF

EDUCATOR RECOGNITION


Illinois Teachers Shine Under the National Spotlight This Month

The incredible work of Illinois educators was recognized on the national stage this month, and we couldn't be prouder! Briana Morales, 2023 Illinois Teacher of the Year from East St. Louis School District 189, and Anne Gray, 2023 Cook County Co-Regional Teacher of the Year from Chicago Public School District 299, were both featured on national talk shows.

Briana visited The Drew Barrymore Show (<https://www.thedrewbarrymoreshow.com/videos/the-2023-illinois-teacher-of-the-year-recipient-on-encouraging-her-students-to-turn-their>) to discuss her work supporting students experiencing trauma and was surprised with a \$10,000 donation for her nonprofit, (Sister)Hood of Hope (<https://thesisterhoodofhope.org/>). She also received a donation of \$1,000 from FiveBelow for supplies for her student resource closet! Music teacher Anne Gray was featured on the Today Show (<https://www.today.com/video/music-teacher-gets-big-surprise-from-students-and-adam-sandler-198300741553>) this week for her work with music students and was gifted a \$5,000 donation which she plans to use to purchase new music equipment. The day was made even more special after Anne received a surprise message from comedian Adam Sandler.

Briana and Anne are both members of the 2023 Illinois Teachers of the Year cohort and represent some of the top teachers around the state elevating the teaching profession. ISBE is so proud to see these great teachers from our state receiving national attention for their hard work and dedication to our children!

Subscribe to Soar: ISBE'S Educator Recognition Newsletter

Discover inspiring stories of educator triumphs statewide in ISBE's monthly educator recognition newsletter. Stay informed about awards, honors, and recognition opportunities spanning all educational domains. In the Soar November issue  (</Documents/Soar-20231121.pdf>), Illinois History Teacher of the Year Dr. Tyrone W. Williams Jr. discusses the importance of building strong classroom content and facing difficult topics head on with students. Access current and past issues on the ISBE's elevating educators webpage (</elevatingeducators>). Subscribers are invited to contribute success stories and shout outs from their schools or communities for future features. To subscribe to Soar (</subscribe>), choose "Educator Recognition Newsletter" and register your preferred email address. Join ISBE today in applauding the remarkable achievements of our educators!

Batavia's Chris Lowe Wins 2023 Thomas Lay Burroughs Award for Outstanding School Board Member

ISBE has presented Chris Lowe of Batavia School District 101 with the 2023 Thomas Lay Burroughs Award, recognizing him as Illinois' outstanding school board member. Lowe served for eight years as Batavia District 101 School Board's first-ever Black member and championed inclusivity, community engagement, and courageous dialogue to identify and work to close student achievement gaps.

The Burroughs Award, instituted by ISBE in 1991 in memory of the late ISBE Chair Thomas Lay Burroughs, commends outstanding local leadership. ISBE Board Chair Dr. Steven Isoye presented Lowe with the award Sunday at the 2023 Joint Annual Conference (<https://www.iasb.com/conference/>) (also known as Triple I), hosted by the Illinois Association of School Boards, Illinois Association of School Business Officials, and Illinois Association of School Administrators in Chicago.

In his time on the board, Lowe co-founded the Batavia Community Diversity Initiative (BCDI) and expanded access to anti-racist educational materials via the BCDI's Freedom Library. Lowe partnered with the Batavia Historical Society and Batavia Depot Museum to celebrate Black History and to amplify and grow an exhibit, "Community, Culture and Conversations: African American Heritage in Batavia," which empowers Black students and community members to

connect with their rich heritage. Lowe secured grant funding to support education initiatives; start healing dialogues and community engagement efforts pertaining to racial equity and social justice, including Community Conversations; and hold monthly meetings to address critical topics, such as political participation and achievement gaps within the community.

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

17th Annual Create-A-Greeting Card Scholarship Contest

The Gallery Collection invites high school students to enter the 17th Annual Create-A-Greeting Card \$10,000 Scholarship Contest (<https://www.gallerycollection.com/greetingcardscontests.htm>). Students can design a greeting card for the opportunity to win a \$10,000 scholarship and \$1,000 for their school. Plus, the winning entry will be made into a bona fide greeting card. Learn more about the contest on the Gallery Collection website (<https://www.gallerycollection.com/greeting-cards-scholarship.htm>).

Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy Invites Students to Enroll in Hybrid Advanced Computer Science Course

The Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA) is launching a hybrid Object Oriented Programming pilot class this spring, which also offers college credit for participating students. Please pass along information on IMSA's hybrid programming class (<https://imsa.edu/youth-outreach/java/>) to any junior or senior you know who would enjoy this experience.

FEATURED ISBE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

- Accountant (Principal Consultant #187) (</Lists/ISBECareers/CareerDisplayForm.aspx?ID=902>)
- Agriculture Principal Consultant (Principal Consultant #464) (</Lists/ISBECareers/CareerDisplayForm.aspx?ID=795>)
- GATA Pre-Qualification (Principal Consultant #181) (</Lists/ISBECareers/CareerDisplayForm.aspx?ID=900>)

View all open positions at ISBE (</Pages/Careers-at-ISBE.aspx>).

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Ed Leaders Network

Ed Leaders Network is offering the following live webinar. Visit the Ed Leaders course library (<https://edleadersnetwork.org/>) to view the entire selection available.

- **3 p.m. Nov. 28:** Intentional Equity Centered Leadership Planning -- Participants will explore Dr. Jen Cheatham's newest work on equity-focused entry planning and determine what intentional moves they can make to support their schools' respective equity journey. They will learn to move from passive conversations to purposeful and intentional actions that lift up students, family, and the school community. The conversation will leave leaders with actionable next steps to continue and sustain their work.