ISBE's Weekly Message

September 16, 2025

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Dr. Tony Sanders visited Round Lake CUSD 116 last week with Superintendent Donn Mendoza, State Sen. Mary Edly-Allen, and State Rep. Laura Faver Dias to observe the district's innovative and effective use of Evidence-Based Funding to support students.

NOMINATE A COLLEAGUE FOR THE 2026 THOSE WHO EXCEL & TEACHER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Dear Colleagues:

There's nothing quite like standing on stage each spring at our Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Awards Banquet. As of today, you have only two weeks left to ensure the outstanding teachers, staff, and administrators in your school and district receive recognition at the 2026 awards by submitting Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year nominations, due **Oct. 1**.

Now more than ever we need to uplift educators ... our teachers, administrators, and administrative support professionals who show up every day ready to make a difference in the lives of children. I am so blessed to be able to regularly see the great work happening in schools across this great state. I've met so many educators worthy of recognition.

It is such an honor to stand on the stage at the event and personally thank the hundreds of educators who are recognized.

This year, I hope you'll help us make the celebration even better by submitting your nominations for the 2026 Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year Awards. The nomination window is open now and we will be accepting nominations until **11:59 p.m. on Oct. 1**. Please consider sharing this Those Who Excel & Teacher of the Year nomination form with your district leaders and staff and encouraging them to nominate an outstanding educator or staff member for this year's awards. You can find everything you need, including eligibility information, nomination guidance, and timelines on our Awards Process Overview webpage. Nominations can be submitted by administrators, staff, students, or community members. There is no limit to the number of nominations that can be submitted by an individual or school.

We have made one change to the nomination process that we want to highlight. Effective this year, we are no longer accepting nominations in the Team category. We made this change to better elevate the individual contributions of our educators. Nominations will continue to be accepted in six professional categories: Teacher (5+ years of teaching experience), Early Career Educator (1-4 years of teaching experience), Administrator, Educational Service Personnel, Student Support Personnel, and Community Volunteer.

In addition to the hundreds of awards we give each year, one exceptional teacher is selected to serve as the Illinois Teacher of the Year, a title currently held by Víctor Gómez, an exceptional bilingual educator from Leyden Community High School District 212. The 2026 Teacher of the Year will take a paid sabbatical during the 2026–27 school year to step outside of their classroom and serve as a full-time ambassador for education in Illinois. They'll visit schools, engage in professional learning, and represent Illinois in the National Teacher of the Year program, standing alongside the best teachers in the country.

If you've ever said, "I wish more people could see what this teacher is doing," or "That paraprofessional is the heart of our school," this is your moment. Recognition doesn't just uplift individuals; it boosts morale across entire school communities and highlights what excellence in education looks like.

So go ahead and brag a little. Brag a lot! Nominate those who excel.

And I'll be waiting at the end of that stage in the spring, hand extended, ready to say thank you.

All my best,

Tony

Dr. Tony Sanders
State Superintendent of Education

WANT TO SEE YOUR SCHOOL FEATURED AS ISBE'S PHOTO OF THE WEEK?

Just follow these three, easy steps!

1. Capture the moment. (Make sure your camera is horizontal!)
2. Ensure all students featured have a signed photo consent form on file.

3. Email the photo (in .jpg format) to photos@isbe.net. Don't forget to include a description of the photo.

HERE'S THE LATEST...

FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

NEW FAMILY ENGAGEMENT CHECKLISTS

Visit the ISBE Family and Community Engagement Framework Guide webpage to find the new FACE framework checklists. The new checklists support schools and districts in evaluating their current engagement plan and practices for future strategies to improve how they partner with all families in support of each student's academic success and socioemotional well-being.

STANDARDS & INSTRUCTION

EXPLORE THE NEW ILLINOIS LEARNING COMPASS TOOL

ISBE is excited to announce the launch of Illinois Learning Compass, a user-friendly digital tool that makes it easier to navigate the Illinois Learning Standards.

The Illinois Learning Compass allows users to search, filter, and export standards. This tool supports planning, collaboration, and instructional alignment across grade levels and content areas. Illinois Learning Compass is designed for educators, families, and anyone looking to explore what Illinois students are expected to know and be able to do each school year.

Examples of ways this tool may be utilized include:

- Compiling all the grade-level standards into a single resource.
- Identifying concepts and key shifts across grade level standards.
- Connecting across content areas.
- Aligning concepts vertically.

We invite you to explore the tool today and share it with your colleagues. A recorded webinar and demonstration on how to utilize this tool can be viewed on the ISBE YouTube channel.

Please fill out an Illinois Learning Compass Feedback Form or email standards@isbe.net if you want to provide feedback or ask questions.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

DATA STRATEGIES & ANALYTICS

MAKE SURE YOUR EPS AND EIS INFO IS UP TO DATE

Why is it so important to ensure your district's information is up to date in the Entity Profile System (EPS) and the Employment Information System (EIS)? They are our systems of records for districts, schools, and other educational entities. ISBE uses the contact information provided in EPS and EIS to send important communications – like new guidance documents, key dates and deadlines, grant notification letters, webinar

invitations, and more – to school administrators, teachers, and key personnel. Plus, the Student Information System, Illinois Report Card, and EIS all depend on the information stored in EPS to populate and grant permissions.

How do I update my district's information?

- Follow these step-by-step instructions to make minor changes in EPS.
- View this training course to learn how to make changes in EIS.

Questions? Contact EPSchange@isbe.net.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

WELCOMING ALL STUDENTS BACK TO SCHOOL

As we move forward into a new year, ISBE would like to remind districts about the importance of creating welcoming environments. Illinois schools should be safe havens of learning for all students. In response to recent reports of an influx of federal immigration officials entering Illinois, it is imperative that school districts do all in their power to protect their students' right to learn while in their buildings. Review the Non-Regulatory Guidance on Immigration Enforcement Actions and the accompanying resources to support administration, staff, and school boards in implementing protocols and policies when dealing with U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other federal enforcement agencies.

Schools should be trained on implementing district policies and administrators should communicate those policies to families. Also remind and encourage families to update their emergency contacts and have family plans in place in the event of any emergency or detainment. Schools may share resources found on the Illinois Immigration Information Hub and the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights' Know Your Rights fact sheet. This information applies to all families regardless of citizenship status. Together we can make schools safer for all.

BRING PARENTABLE TO YOUR SCHOOL IN 2025-26 — AT NO COST!

Thanks to a renewed partnership between ISBE and ParenTeach, Illinois schools can once again gain free access to *ParentABLE*, a proven, evidence-based and trauma-informed curriculum that gives high school students essential caregiving skills. The program aligns with Illinois' Social Emotional Learning and Health & Wellness Standards, and provides certificates for students and educators — plus professional development hours and stipends for teachers.

New this year: *ParentABLE On-Demand* extends learning to parents and caregivers, strengthening family-school partnerships and creating lasting impact for students, families, and communities. This asynchronous 3-hour course has benefited countless parents and caregivers and is also free to Illinois districts. For more information, visit the ParenTeach website or contact ParenTeach at info@parenteach.org.

FINANCE

FY 2027 BUDGET HEARINGS

Planning for fiscal year 2027 has started, and ISBE invites everyone to provide input on state funding for public education. Budget requests can be submitted until **Oct. 31** using the FY 2027 Budget Request Form.

Testimony at past hearings has led to ISBE advocating for increased investments in Evidence-Based Funding, Career and Technical Education programs, and more. ISBE wants school leaders, classroom teachers, parents, and community advocates to tell us what investments would make a difference for their students.

In addition to the request forms, ISBE will hold three public hearings to receive testimony. Those hearings are coming up soon, on **Sept. 30, Oct. 16, and Oct. 21**. Registration is required, and anyone providing testimony must submit a budget request form before registering. Please note that ISBE will give equal consideration to written and oral testimony.

More information on ISBE's budgeting process is available on our Agency Budget website.

ROE/ISC

ILLINOIS MANDATED TRAINING & NON-REGULATORY REGISTRATION ENROLLMENT GUIDANCE

ISBE is pleased to announce the release of two updated guidance documents for the 2025-26 school year.

- Non-Regulatory Guidance on Registration addresses issues of residency and enrollment, immigrant pupils, homeless pupils, and school fees and waivers.
- Illinois Mandated School Trainings for Public Schools outlines trainings that are mandated for school personnel and board members by various state and federal laws.

Both guidance documents have been updated with changes to law from the spring 2025 legislative session. If you have any questions, please contact the ROE/ISC Department at ROEISC@isbe.net.

WELLNESS & STUDENT CARE

BEST PRACTICES FOR UNIVERSAL MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING IN SCHOOLS TRAININGS

Public Act 104-0032 requires school districts to offer mental health screenings to students enrolled in Grades 3-12 at least once a year, beginning with the 2027-28 school year. This requirement is only in effect for school years in which the state has successfully procured a screening tool that offers a self-report option for students and is made available to school districts at no cost. Schools must obtain signed, dated, written parent/guardian consent for student participation in mental health screening. View the UMHS information slides and Dr. Sander's June 17 weekly column to learn more.

ISBE and Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago's Center for Childhood Resilience are hosting comprehensive sessions designed to enhance your understanding of the mental health needs of Illinois children and adolescents and the benefits of universal mental health screening from **10 a.m.-noon Jan. 27 and Feb. 11, 2026**.

IN BRIEF

EDUCATOR OPPORTUNITIES

ILLINOIS AP AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES SYMPOSIUM

College Board will host the Illinois AP African American Studies Symposium: A Collaborative Exploration from **9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sept. 22** at The DuSable Black History Museum and Education Center in Chicago.

Participants at the AP African American Studies Symposium will celebrate the course's impact during its pilot years, explore how it is being recognized by colleges, engage in a dynamic sample lesson, learn strategies for introducing the course in their schools or districts, and gain insights from a panel of experienced educators.

Questions? Email Meredith Kramer (mkramer@collegeboard.org) or Tamika Thomas (tthomas@collegeboard.org).

EXPLORE DIVERSE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN ILLINOIS PARKS & REC

The Illinois Park & Recreation Association (IPRA) has launched a Workforce Recruitment Resource Kit designed to introduce students to diverse career paths that offer flexibility, career growth, and the chance to make a real impact in their communities. Many students are looking for careers that provide hands-on experiences, creativity, and a sense of purpose. The IPRA "Take a Walk in the Park" campaign highlights job opportunities in parks, recreation, and conservation, as well as supporting fields like marketing, IT, finance, and facility management.

IPRA invites you to use the comprehensive Educator Resource Kit to introduce your students to career paths available in this field. Email kim@ilipra.org if your school is interested in a presentation or attendance at a career fair, with real-life parks and rec professionals to tell their stories!

ED LEADERS NETWORK

Unlocking Human Potential: The Power of Story to Build Resilience, Character, Trust, and Transparency

3 p.m. Sept. 23

This experience, led by Rebecca Francis and Devon LaRosa, is designed for educators and educational leaders who seek to deepen their impact by leading with authenticity, empathy, and intentionality. At its core, "Unlocking Human Potential" recognizes that storytelling is one of the most powerful tools we possess to humanize education and re-center connection in a system that too often prioritizes compliance over compassion.

This session offers more than theory; It offers space — space to reflect, to tell truth, to listen deeply, and to grow. It is an invitation to recognize the stories we carry and the stories our students and colleagues carry and to use those narratives as bridges toward belonging, equity, and possibility. When we share our stories, we don't just build community — we unlock human potential.

Transforming Tragedy: How Unexpected Loss Shapes Emotionally Intelligent Leaders

3 p.m. Sept. 30

This powerful presentation explores the lived experiences of elementary school principals who have faced unexpected, traumatic loss — and how those experiences influenced their emotional intelligence and

leadership style. Through their deeply personal narratives, four key themes emerged: the importance of human connection, emotional insight, service to others, and finding purpose beyond loss. Join presenter Kimber Larson to discover how these leaders transformed grief into growth, offering fresh insights for leadership development, self-awareness, and the role of empathy in education.

ILLINOIS FALL COUNSELOR WORKSHOP

Join the College Board for the Illinois Fall Counselor Workshop, held virtually from **10-11 a.m. Sept. 25**. This free session will provide timely updates and practical resources to support your work as a school counselor.

Topics include:

- AP® and Career Kickstart programming
- BigFuture college and career planning tools
- Additional College Board resources to support your students in the 2025–26 school year

Save your spot at the Illinois Fall Counselor Workshop and share this opportunity with your counselor colleagues.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING & LEADING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This professional development, hosted by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign from **6-7 p.m. Sept. 18**, will offer an overview of culturally responsive leadership.

Objectives:

- Gain an understanding of what culturally responsive leadership entails.
- Discover tools, resources, and practices that support culturally responsive leadership and the implementation of culturally responsive practices.
- Learn and reflect through discussion and interacting with colleagues.

Register for Culturally Responsive Teaching & Leading Professional Development.

ILLINOIS COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES FALL CONFERENCE

Teachers, administrators, and curriculum specialists are invited to the Illinois Council for the Social Studies Conference on **Oct. 17** at Harper College in Palatine. This year's theme is "United We Teach: The Social Studies Classroom as a Laboratory for Civic Trust." Sessions will focus on a wide variety of historical and contemporary narratives, teaching techniques, and classroom-ready resources. Continuing education credit is offered.

DISTRICT OPPORTUNITIES

ELECTRIC SCHOOL BUS TAX CREDITS

The IRS recently issued additional guidance on the 45W tax credit, clarifying that vehicles can be *acquired* (purchased) by **Sept. 30, 2025**, to qualify. Previously, vehicles needed to be *placed into service* (delivered) by Sept. 30, 2025, to qualify.

IRS notes that a vehicle will now be treated as *acquired* as of the date a written binding contract (a purchase agreement) is entered into and a payment has been made. A payment includes a nominal downpayment or a vehicle trade-in.

A new podcast episode by the Association of School Business Officers, World Resources Institute and the Alliance for Electric School Buses covers the 45W and 30C tax credits for electric school buses: Tax Credits, Deadlines, and Your District's EV Transition Plan. This episode explains the tax credit, who can apply, the deadlines, what documents you need, etc.

FEATURED ISBE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

- Commercial Voucher Processor (Fiscal Specialist II #1837)
- Child Nutrition Program Monitor (Principal Consultant #690)
- Grant Reviewer (Principal Consultant #1835)