ISBE's Weekly Message

April 7, 2026

Here's the Latest ...

- Communications
- Career & Technical Education
- Special Education

In Case You Missed it ...

In Brief

See ISBE Dates & Deadlines



This fourth-grader, eye-level with the board, was totally locked in during a recent chess tournament in Community Consolidated School District 21. Quiet, unguarded moments like this show the exact kind of focus and mental challenge we work every day to cultivate.

TEACHER VACANCIES DROP STATEWIDE AS TARGETED GRANTS DELIVER RESULTS

Dear Colleagues:

We have good news to share, and it comes from our annual report on the teacher shortage: As of October, our statewide teacher vacancy rate decreased by 24%, falling from 2.76% in school year 2024-25 to 2.1% in SY 2025-26. This document, formally known as the Unfilled Positions Data Collection, shows that the number of vacant teacher positions is now 2,943. Last year, it was 3,864.

This improvement comes thanks, in part, to the state's Teacher Vacancy Grant (TVG), a pilot program that distributes $120 million over a three-year span among the 170 school districts with the greatest staffing needs. When the program launched in 2023, these selected districts accounted for 80% of the teacher vacancies statewide. Findings from TVG's second year show broad, substantial impact. Between 2023 and 2025, the TVG districts hired more than 12,400 new teachers and retained nearly 16,000 educators.

For example, Prairie Central CUSD 8's greatest challenge is its rural location in Fairbury (population 3,633). So this district opted to use their TVG funds to provide locals who already have college degrees the chance to use distance learning to earn a teaching degree, in exchange for a three-year commitment to the district. As a result, 13 community members have now obtained education degrees! Meanwhile in Normal, McLean County USD 5's most pressing challenge was filling special education and English as a second language (ESL) positions. So Unit 5 used $100,000 to cover tuition for current staff members to complete the special education teacher licensure program or earn certification to teach dual credit or ESL and bilingual classes. Eight teachers have now attained new credentials, and more are on their way to doing so.

While we're proud of this progress, we also recognize that significant needs remain, especially in high-demand areas. Special education alone accounts for 1,079 unfilled teaching positions — that's roughly one-third of all teaching vacancies statewide. These persistent gaps compel us to continue our targeted efforts to expand the pipeline and support educators in the most critical roles.

Next month, we will host a daylong Teacher Vacancy Grant Summit, gathering district leaders, education preparation partners, and interested educators to share successful strategies and explore opportunities to strengthen teacher pipelines. If you want to explore more detailed findings on the Teacher Vacancy Grant, we have three reports, including a second-year evaluation, addendum, and qualitative analysis of districts showing early success, on our Teacher Vacancy Grant webpage. The 2026 Unfilled Positions Public Data Set and the 2026 Unfilled Positions dashboard are available on our Educator Workforce Insights webpage.

We will continue working with Governor JB Pritzker and the General Assembly to sustain and build on this progress, ensuring every Illinois student has access to a well-supported, highly qualified educator.

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...

COMMUNICATIONS

ANNUAL SURVEY NOW OPEN FOR ISBE'S WEEKLY MESSAGE READERS

You're invited to take our annual Weekly Message Survey to help us better understand what's working and where we can improve. Your feedback helps us enhance the content, format, and timing of this weekly email so it aligns with your preferences, interests, and reading habits. The survey has just 10 questions, and your input directly informs future updates.

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

ONE CLICK COLLEGE ADMIT WORKSHOPS

With the growing interest and participation in the state's direct college admissions program, the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) will host additional One Click College Admit virtual workshops in April. This is a great way to help class of 2027 students take a simple, no-cost step toward college admission — before the **May 22** opt-in deadline. In addition to the presentation, ISACorps members will be available to assist attendees in completing the opt-in process.

- **April 7 | noon-1 p.m.**
- **April 15 | noon-1 p.m.**
- **April 16 | 6-7 p.m.**
- **April 21 | 6-7 p.m.**
- **April 23 | noon-1 p.m.**
- **April 29 | 6-7 p.m.**

SPECIAL EDUCATION

DYSCALCULIA AND DYSLEXIA HANDBOOKS

The Illinois State Board of Education and the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) Support Project are excited to share two resources designed to build understanding and strengthen support for students with dyscalculia and dyslexia.

The Dyscalculia Handbook fills a critical gap in understanding math-related learning disabilities. It was created to help educators, families, and students better understand dyscalculia, a learning disorder that affects a person's ability to understand numbers, calculations, and mathematical reasoning. It provides clear explanations of the condition, its characteristics, and how it impacts learning.

The Illinois Dyslexia Handbook provides educators, school leaders, families, guardians, and students with clear information and guidance on dyslexia. It outlines how to identify signs of dyslexia, describes evidence-based instructional practices that improve academic outcomes, and highlights available resources and services to support students and those who work with them.

Both handbooks and additional resources can be found on the SLD Support Project website.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

ISBE CAREER CONNECTIONS CONFERENCE

Find fresh ideas, real conversations, and practical takeaways at the 2026 ISBE Career Connections Conference on **May 6, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m.** Dedicated sessions will highlight key initiatives, updates, and resources to support your work in Career and Technical Education (CTE). Check out the ISBE Career Connections Conference website for more information and register for Career Connections by **April 29**.

STANDARDS & INSTRUCTION

ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

The Illinois Learning Compass now includes an Illinois America 250 indicator. This image indicates which Illinois Learning Standards align with the America 250 and Illinois 250 celebrations. Some content standards, such as math and science, can be effectively leveraged to highlight Illinois America 250 in a variety of instructional activities. However, these content standards may not independently align with this celebration in the same way as English language arts and social science standards. For this reason, they are not included in the listing, though educators are encouraged to integrate these content areas where appropriate.

IN BRIEF

EDUCATOR OPPORTUNITIES

FREE POSTSECONDARY AND CAREER EXPECTATIONS CURRICULUM AND UPCOMING TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

Did you know that the Illinois Postsecondary and Career Expectations (PaCE) Framework includes a middle school PaCE curriculum? Free training opportunities are offered statewide to support access and implementation of the curriculum, with the next training taking place **April 21 from 8:30 a.m.-noon** at Parkland College in Champaign. For more information and to register, visit ISAC's Upcoming Professional Development Offerings webpage. Contact Kelly Koeppel with questions.

SCIENCE OF LEARNING MICROCREDENTIAL

The Science of Learning Microcredential, hosted by the Specific Learning Disability Support Project, equips educators with practical, high-impact science of learning strategies to improve outcomes for all students. The course blends asynchronous modules with live virtual sessions that model effective instructional practices and support educators in applying them to their own classrooms. Participants who complete the program earn 23 professional development hours toward license renewal.

SUPPORTING MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS IN RURAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Rural school districts across Illinois are invited to participate in WIDA's Project RESPECT, a free professional learning opportunity for teams of rural K-8 teachers to support multilingual learners. While the program is designed for K-8 teachers, high school educators are welcome to join. Project RESPECT is one year of hybrid, inquiry-based professional learning with a total of three six- to eight-week inquiry cycles that will occur during the 2026-27 school year. Contact ProjectRespect@wcer.wisc.edu to learn more.

ILLINOIS COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF MATHEMATICS FOURTH ANNUAL PK-12 TEACHER MINI-CONFERENCE

The Illinois Council of Teachers of Mathematics (ICTM) will host the fourth annual PK-12 Teacher Mini-Conference **May 2**, **8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.** at locally led, remotely connected sites across the state. Moderators will engage participants in productive conversations and tasks with ready-to-use classroom strategies and collectively explore how teachers can foster and support mathematical numeracy in their classrooms. ISBE staff will also share information about the second draft of the Illinois Comprehensive Numeracy Plan.

Participants who register in ISBE's PD+ platform can earn Illinois professional development (PD) hours. Registration is free for ICTM members and pre-service teachers and $35 for nonmembers (which includes a one-year complimentary membership). Specific site details and instructions for PD hours will be sent upon registration. Reach out to MiniConference@ictm.org if you have any questions.

STUDENT & FAMILY OPPORTUNITIES

ISAC YOUTUBE LIVE EVENTS FOR PARENTS IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH

ISAC's next English and Spanish YouTube live sessions for parents are on **April 16** and will focus on "Preparing for College During High School Years." Learn more on ISAC's YouTube channel.

CONNECTING FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS

Please encourage your high school seniors who aspire to be the first person in their family to finish college to join ISAC's First Generation Scholars Network (FGSN). The goal of FGSN is to connect first-generation college students with one another so they can support each other through this network and for FGSN students to receive additional support year-round from ISACorps near-peer mentors. Students can join by completing the online form provided on the FGSN webpage. Email questions to ISAC.FirstGen@illinois.gov.

CAST YOUR VOTE TO CHOOSE THE ILLINOIS STATE COLORS

The State Designations Act lays out Illinois state symbols, ranging from the state bird to the state flower. However, Illinois does not have an official state color(s). Students from Pekin Community High School and East Aurora High School are working to change that. They researched colors representative of our state's rich agricultural, architectural, and musical history — soybean green and Maxwell Street blue — and are seeking input from students around the state. All K-12 students in Illinois are encouraged to cast their vote for Illinois' official colors by the end of class on **April 23**.

FEATURED ISBE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

- Special Education Facility Rate Analyst (Principal Consultant #1943)
- Web Developer (Principal Consultant #1081, 1920)
- Receptionist (Program Specialist I #667)