Message From State Superintendent Christopher A. Koch

Two weeks ago I had the opportunity to travel to D.C. for the Council of Chief State School Officers Legislative Conference. During this time, I had the opportunity to speak with officials at the U.S. Department of Education and staff members for the Illinois Congressional delegation regarding Illinois’ Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver and other important education topics.

In addition, there was discussion on the federal budget and I want to make sure that you are aware of potential issues that could have significant impact on Illinois schools during the coming school year. A bipartisan deficit-reduction super committee failed to develop a plan in late 2011 for lowering the federal budget deficit by $1.2 trillion over 10 years, triggering plans for automatic cuts to all discretionary funding, known as sequestration. It’s estimated that if Congress does nothing to stop sequestration, education programs may be cut by more than 9 percent or $4 billion in 2013 alone. The actual amount of the cuts is still unclear. The Congressional Budget Office and others are projecting cuts in every nonexempt non-defense discretionary program of between 7.8 percent and 9.3 percent. The amounts to be cut will be calculated by OMB and ordered by the president on Jan. 2, 2013.

Unfortunately, these cuts will be automatic unless Congress decides otherwise and will not be definitively known by schools until the sequestration date in January 2013.

I have spoken with several members of Congress and many feel sequestration is a very real possibility that will likely not be dealt with until after the presidential election. I will be working with our Congressional delegation so that they understand the impact to our schools and I encourage you to reach out to your local members of Congress to educate them of the impact of sequestration on your district, schools and students.

We have been sharing this information with school districts and stakeholder organizations so they can be prepared for the possibility. In addition, we have let them know that the American Association of School Administrators has developed an Excel...
sheet that districts can use to calculate the impact of sequestration on school districts. We have posted the spreadsheet along with some other resources about sequestration on our website at http://www.isbe.net/sequestration/.

Thank you all for your work on behalf of Illinois students.

Chris

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**No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Waiver**

Illinois submitted its Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver on Feb. 23. Last fall, President Barack Obama announced plans to allow states to apply for waivers that allow states to request flexibility with respect to specific requirements of NCLB in exchange for putting together a comprehensive plan that includes closing the achievement gap, increasing education outcomes for all students, improving the quality of instruction for all students and increasing equity.

Eleven states applied during the first round and all states have ultimately had their waiver accepted with modifications to the original request after having gone through discussions and negotiations with the U.S. Department of Education (USED).

Illinois submitted a waiver during the second application round after more than 27 meetings with more than 1,500 individuals and multiple organizations and associations weighing in on our plan. We’ve had some conversations with the U.S. Department of Education and expect to get some feedback shortly on their concerns and any wishes for change. It is a give-and-take process. We expect to hear by June.

The State Board of Education believes this is a much smarter and updated accountability plan that reflects changes in technology, testing and our understanding of what students need to learn in order to be ready to succeed in college and careers. Thought it’s not a one-size-fit-all approach. We have two clear overarching goals:

- Cut in half the percent of Illinois students not achieving progress toward college and career expectations within six years or by 2018.
- Cut in half the state’s achievement gaps within six years or by 2018.

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**Supplemental Educational Services Changes Proposed in NCLB Waiver**

When President Obama announced the opportunity for states to apply for flexibility from provision of the No Child Left Behind Act, it was announced that one of the provisions to be waived is the requirement for states to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) determinations and the resulting sanctions (Choice, SES,
corrective action and restructuring and their corresponding required set-asides). ISBE heard from a number of individuals specifically on this part of the waiver and have had a number of inquiries from legislative offices on what this will mean for Illinois if the waiver is granted.

As noted above, Illinois chose to apply for the flexibility offered in the waiver, which means that school districts will have the option to offer after-school tutoring but it will not be mandatory nor have to operate under the same constraints as SES. The reason behind this choice is three fold:

1) School districts can better use those funds set-aside for SES and Choice to serve the needs of all eligible students. Only 10.3 percent of all eligible students participate in the program currently and allowing those funds to be redirected would allow more students to benefit.

2) There have been three evaluations released on the impact of SES providers on student academic achievement, attendance and parent satisfaction. Based on the most recent 2010-11 evaluation, the student academic achievement results have been more or less uninformative as all but two providers resulted in statistically insufficient information to draw meaningful conclusions. Two providers were found to be below standards. Again, ISBE believes these funds can and should be redirected to programs and services that can more meaningfully impact student achievement.

3) We conducted a survey on the views of SES and out of 752 respondents the majority of respondents think SES should be optional or waived altogether (58.9 percent strongly support, support or want to waive completely vs. 32.1 percent who strongly oppose or oppose such measures, 9.2 percent had no opinion). School districts will have the option to offer after-school tutoring but it will not be mandatory nor have to operate under the same constraints as SES.

Race to the Top Phase III

Last year on Dec. 23, the U.S. Department of Education announced that Illinois was one of seven states that won a Race to the Top Round 3 (RTTT3) award. The nine states that were runners-up in the Race to the Top competition last year were eligible to apply for RTTT3 to implement K-12 education reforms outlined in the state’s application with the goal of improving student achievement. Illinois’ award is $42,818,707 over four years. Half of the funding will be used by the State Board of Education to build up overall educational infrastructure in the state, which includes implementing the new Common Core Learning Standards in Math and English Language Arts, supporting the development of teacher and principal effectiveness systems, bolstering the development of our data systems and advancing STEM initiatives. The grant requires the other half of the funds to be reserved for participating districts that wish to move more aggressively in the implementation of our reform agenda. Over 140 districts initially indicated...
interest in applying for the RTTT3 funds, which, as required by the grant, will be disbursed based on percentage of Title I funding the districts receive. By the March 30 deadline, 40 districts submitted a Scope of Work for conditional approval. ISBE expects to name the Participating LEAs by the end of this month. The final cohort of districts will help chart the course for non-participating districts by being among the first to implement key components of the state’s key reforms and new initiatives.

**Education Jobs Funds**

On Aug. 30, 2010, Illinois received an approved grant award for the new federal Education Jobs (Ed Jobs) Fund program in the amount of $415,397,841. These funds may be used for compensation and benefit costs to retain, rehire or hire new employees and will be distributed to local education agencies (LEAs) on a reimbursement basis per federal guidance.

As of March 31, 928 recipients have requested $370,714,021 in Ed Jobs funds. This represents 89.23 percent of the total funds Illinois received. Eight hundred and sixty recipients have received all funds, 68 have partially drawn down the funds and 16 districts have not drawn down any funds to date. The last date for obligation is Sept. 30, 2012.

**Basic Skills Test**

Beginning on Feb. 1, 2012, the Basic Skills test on computer was replaced with the ICTS Test of Academic Proficiency. The Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) will be administered only as a computer-based test, and registration will open in early 2012. The Basic Skills test continued to be administered at the January, February and April 2012 paper-based test administrations only.

The Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) consists of the following subtests:

- ICTS TAP: Reading Comprehension
- ICTS TAP: Language Arts
- ICTS TAP: Mathematics
- ICTS TAP: Writing

Examinees taking the Test of Academic Proficiency will have the opportunity to register for all four subtests in one test session or for each subtest independently. The total fee for registering for all four subtests is $125, and the total fee for registering for one subtest is $75. Examinees will not be required to complete subtests they have already passed.

If an examinee has previously passed one or more Basic Skills (300) subtests, the passing score(s) will count toward the passing of the Test of Academic Proficiency.
Proficiency. However, test scores from the previous ICTS Basic Skills test model (096) (administered prior to Sept. 11, 2010) cannot be applied to fulfill passing requirements for individual subtests.

Each attempt of one or more Test of Academic Proficiency subtests counts toward the ICTS Test Attempt Limit Policy of five attempts per test. However, previous Basic Skills (300) attempts do not count toward Test of Academic Proficiency (400) attempts, even if an examinee passed one or more Basic Skills subtests. In addition, those passing scores for Basic Skills (300) subtests are being applied to the Test of Academic Proficiency.

Pursuant to current Administrative Rules (25.720), if someone passed the Basic Skills test within 10 years of the date of application for certification, that score remains valid, and the individual does not need to re-take the test of basic skills. Also, if a person passed the test of basic skills as a condition of admittance to an Illinois preparation program, that individual would not be required to retake the test regardless of when the test was taken. That includes the Basic Skills test.

Scores for the Test of Academic Proficiency will be delayed until spring 2012 while ISBE establishes a passing score for the test.

A webinar on the score setting process has been scheduled for 8 to 9:30 a.m. April 26, 2012. The purpose of this webinar is to provide information on what occurs when experts convene to review the test and provide data that will go to the State Teacher Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB). Then the SEPLB makes a recommendation to the State Board to set passing scores on required state tests. The opportunity to post questions will be limited. Individuals must register for this webinar at http://www.isbe.net/certification.

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**Maintenance Grant Program Application Deadline is May 1**

On Feb. 16, Gov. Pat Quinn announced the release of $50 million for the Maintenance Grant Program as a part of the Illinois Jobs Now! Capital Program.

The application period opened March 1 and will remain open until May 1, 2012. Applications must be submitted to Regional Offices of Education.

The Maintenance Grant Program is a dollar for dollar state matching grant program providing up to $50,000 for the maintenance or upkeep of buildings or structures for educational purposes. All school districts, cooperative high schools and Type 40 area vocational centers are eligible.

For more information and assistance, go to the School Maintenance Program Grant page on the ISBE website at http://www.isbe.net/sbss/smp_grants.htm.

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**Streamlining Illinois Regional Offices of Education Commission Reports**

Per PA 97-0619 (SB 2147) created the Streamlining Illinois Regional Offices of Education Commission. The Commission
began meeting in February and completed its work by the statutory deadline of April 1. The purpose of the commission was (1) to examine the duties of the ROEs, Intermediate Service Centers (ISCs), and ISBE to determine which responsibilities are more efficiently and effectively provided regionally, with specific funding to carry it out; and (2) to assess the current boundaries of the educational service regions to determine if they can be expanded to streamline the ROEs.

The commission considered two sets of recommendations: the five recommendations made by the 2010 Streamlining Illinois’ Educational Delivery Systems Task Force and the five recommendations offered to the 2012 Commission by the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS). The commission suggested that the 2010 recommendations be recognized and addressed.


The governor largely recommended that most ISBE line items be level funded between years. Of the $31.8 million increase he proposed for ISBE, 83 percent of it – $26.4 million – of it was in three programs: Early Childhood, Bilingual, and Standards and Assessments. There was a $20 million (6.2 percent) increase for Early Childhood Education; $3 million (4.7 percent) for Bilingual Education, and $3.4 million for Standards and Assessments. The governor also made a recommendation for an additional $2 million for Lowest Performing Schools in the School Reform and Accountability category.

Notably, the governor did not recommend increases for General State Aid, Mandated Categoricals or for educator reform efforts such as Performance Evaluations and Principal, Teacher and Administrator Mentoring.

ISBE continues to advocate for a modest increase or even flat funding for FY 13.

**ISBE Board Meetings**

The next meeting of the State Board will take place May 16-17 in Springfield at the State Board offices. A calendar of 2012 meeting dates can be found at http://isbe.net/calendar/default.htm.

**Going Green**

In an effort to be more environmentally conscious, ISBE will be sending out communications, including budget updates and letters from the State Superintendent, via email instead of
through the mail. This effort will both reduce administrative time within the agency and provide cost savings for printing and mailing. In the future, the email address used for this message will be the one used for all ISBE communications from the State Superintendent, Board and Governmental Relations staff. If you have an alternative email address to which you would like this information sent, or if you change email addresses, please contact Nicole Wills (nwills@isbe.net) or Cynthia Riseman (criseman@isbe.net) in our Governmental Relations Division so that your information can be updated and so that you can receive this information in a timely manner.

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**Legislative Liaisons and GA Scholarship Questions**

For all constituent or bill inquiries, contact Nicole Wills (nwills@isbe.net) or Cynthia Riseman (criseman@isbe.net) in the Governmental Relations Division at (217) 782-6510 or by fax at (217) 782-3097.

If you have any questions or paperwork concerning General Assembly scholarships, those should be directed to Kim Clarke at kclarke@isbe.net or (217) 782-4648.