

Illinois SCHOOL BOARD *Newsbulletin*

January 2007 / Issue No. 657

Schools cope with test scoring delays; data will be late again

State, contractor blame each other for problems

The protracted scoring of 160,000 Illinois students' test results by state vendor Harcourt Assessment have continued to delay the 2006 school report card delivery process into 2007. By law, Illinois test results were to be released to the public through school report cards by Oct. 31.

Problems occurred with regard to provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which requires all states to measure each public school's and district's student achievement and to establish annual student achievement targets for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The Illinois State Board of Education informed school superintendents in December that Harcourt used a wrong answer key to score one portion of the two-part Prairie State Achievement Exams. Prairie State is the standardized test for 11th-grade students used in NCLB compliance.

The incorrect scoring will not have an impact on final test results because all erroneous test records were removed and the data was rescored, according to Becky McCabe of the Illinois State

Board of Education's Student Assessment Division.

Most schools and school districts instituted other testing measures to compensate for the lack of test results. Payson CUSD 1 near Quincy, for example, used the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The ITBS are nationally standardized achievement tests that provide a comprehensive assessment of student progress in all the basic educational skills.

The primary reason for using a standardized achievement test battery such as the ITBS is to gather information that can be used to help improve instruction of individual students. This is a departure from the apparent aims and uses of NCLB testing, which punishes schools but does not allow for identifying individual student scores or progress.

But even in the limited way in which NCLB test results could help, it may be too late this year for schools to modify their teaching methods based on what they learn from the late scores.

See **ISAT** on page 4



Payment options offered to spread out district electric bills

The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) approved separate but similar plans on Dec. 20 developed by Ameren and ComEd that will soften the impact of higher electricity costs for the vast majority of their customers.

The plans are now available to residential customers, including eligible schools, providing options to help them manage higher electricity costs beginning this year. The voluntary programs mean that customers can reduce the initial rate increases and pay for the deferred amounts at a later time, with a below-market interest rate of 3.25 percent.

For information about the specifics of the plans, visit the ICC's Web site, <http://www.icc.illinois.gov/div/pr.aspx>

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State minimum wage to increase on July 1

The state minimum wage requirement already exceeds the federal standard and will increase on July 1. With all the talk about the U.S. Congress' plan to raise the federal minimum wage, some could forget that Illinois already guarantees a higher wage than the federal requirement.

Illinois law guarantees a minimum wage of \$6.50 per hour for workers 18 years and older; workers under 18 may be paid \$.50 per hour less than the adult minimum wage. Effective July 1, 2007, the state minimum wage will be \$7.50.

School districts are subject to the requirements of hourly minimum wage laws in paying support staff, although those laws do not apply to teachers. Additional information is available from the Illinois Dept. of Labor, <http://www.state.il.us/agency/idol/laws/Law105.htm>.

Chemistry literacy grant launched for rural teachers

A new grant sponsored by the National Science Foundation to assist chemistry teachers in rural high schools throughout Illinois is now available to applicants. The Institute for Chemistry Literacy and Computational Science (ICLCS) is a program of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign – through the Department of Chemistry, the College of Medicine, and the National Center for Supercomputing Applications – in partnership with A-C Central District 262, Ashland, and Regional Office of Education 38.

This is a \$5 million grant that specifically targets chemistry instructors in small, rural schools. Teachers are encouraged to apply by Jan. 31. Applications are being accepted at: <http://iclcs.uiuc.edu>.

New national report critical of districts, boards and spending

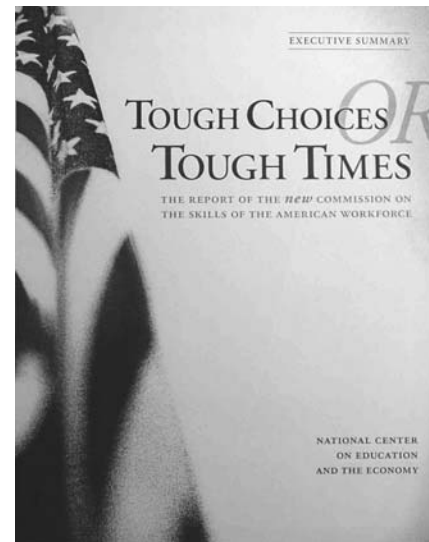
A recent report endorsed by the National Center on Education and the Economy, and written by the New Commission on The Skills of the American Workforce, offers an integrated plan for overhauling the nation's education system while all but scrapping public school boards.

That is just one of a number of major, controversial changes proposed by the report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. The report's long list of recommended changes, the authors claim, will save \$60 billion nationally.

It suggests dramatic changes in the role and oversight of the school board, such as giving individual schools the autonomy and authority to run their own building operations. Under the plan, schools would be funded directly by the state.

Not everyone agrees: "The idea of giving individual schools the autonomy to run their own building operations may sound attractive, but is irresponsible without an adequate analysis of the time, skill, and resources that would need to be expended by building administrators" said Anne L. Bryant, Executive Director of the National School Boards Association.

But Bryant says there are several areas within the report that school leaders do agree on, such as:



- Providing high quality, universal early childhood education;
- Targeting additional resources to disadvantaged students; and
- Increasing teacher salaries to attract some of the young adults who are now pursuing more financially rewarding careers.


Background material is available on the commission's Web site at: <http://www.skillscommission.org/study.htm>. For a copy of the report's executive summary, visit: <http://www.skillscommission.org/executive.htm>.

Illinois
SCHOOL BOARD
Newsbulletin

Illinois Association of School Boards

This newsletter is published monthly by the Illinois Association of School Boards for member boards of education and their superintendents. The Illinois Association of School Boards, an Illinois not-for-profit corporation, is a voluntary association of local boards of education and is not affiliated with any branch of government.

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ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS



New state laws address wide span of school issues

Open meetings, student truancy top '07 list

Perhaps the biggest change in state law for 2007 is something Illinois lawmakers did 10 years ago and have not agreed to change.

As of January most consumers, including most schools, will pay from 22 percent to 55 percent more for electric service, as a 10-year state-mandated rate freeze expires. State regulators approved the higher rates set by an auction process in September, which prompted an election-year rush to block them.

Legislative leaders could not agree on a bill and lawmakers ended their fall veto session without approving another rate freeze or phase-in. Power companies won approval of their own phase-in plans, however, before the Illinois Commerce Commission. (See sidebar on page 1 on what this means for customers, including schools.)

That issue aside, legislators stayed busy changing state laws on a number of other topics relevant to schools, including everything from open meetings to teenage driving.

An amendment to the state's Open Meetings Act expands the definition of a meeting to include video and audio conferences, e-mails, Internet chat rooms and other forms of communication. So school board members, like most public officials, now can't talk public business electronically, face-to-face or over the telephone outside of announced public meetings.

But some officials say the wording of the change is vague and the restrictions go too far.

"You're inhibiting communications that are just natural. ... That can't be good for any democracy," said Tari Renner, a political science professor at Illinois Wesleyan University and member of the McLean County Board in central Illinois. The law took effect on Jan. 1.

Some of the laws passed in 2006 will not take effect until July 1. One law with an effective date of July aims to curb the high school dropout rate by linking students' school attendance with their driving privileges. Under that measure, the secretary of state may refuse to issue or renew the graduated license or learner's permit of a minor who misses too much school.

Other legislation

- **SB 380 (Cronin, R-Elmhurst)** was amended in November with several education-related provisions. It increases the debt limit for three school districts and allows one to levy a supplemental tax. Passed in November, the bill will become law.
- **SB 862 (del Valle, D-Chicago)**, regarding the student teaching portion of the early childhood teaching certificate, allows for the student (or candidate) to be under the active supervision of a teacher who is qualified in "self-contained, general elementary education." The bill will be sent to the governor.
- **SB 2300 (Link, D-Vernon Hills)** would have extended the "7% Solution" Alternative Homestead Exemption. The bill died.
- **HB 3752 (Mendoza, D-Chicago)** contains "clean-up" language for the recent increase in the minimum wage. The bill will be sent to the governor.

All new laws are available at: <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/default.asp>

Illinois delegation preparing for D.C. lobbying trip

This year's National School Boards Association's Federal Relations Network (FRN) lobbying effort by school board leaders, known as the 34th Annual FRN Legislative Conference, will be held in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 28-30.

Conference participants will join with colleagues from across the nation to obtain congressional support for achieving excellence and equity in public education by:

- Increasing the federal investment in education to help improve student achievement;

See **FRN** on page 8



IASB President Marie Slater (left) discusses plans with the Illinois delegation at last year's event in Washington D.C..

ISAT *from page 1*

“You’re trying to make academic decisions based on these results for this year, yet we’re into the second semester and we still don’t know how we did on our tests from last year,” Belvidere CUSD 100 schools chief Don Schlomann said.

Christie Dickens, principal at Dewey Elementary School in Quincy SD 172, said their district returned to an approach that predates NCLB. “Teachers observed the kids, made their individual assessments. Instruction began and hit the ground running early... .”

Quincy’s Jody Cooper, the district’s director of testing and technology, agrees, and says state testing is just one small piece of the pie when it comes to analyzing student and school progress. The district also uses other tests, plus individual assessments by teachers.

But Kevin Anderson, Oak Park ESD 97 assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, said District 97 prepares for each spring’s tests based on the previous year’s results. He adds that schools had to begin preparing for the spring 2007 ISATs even without knowing how they did on the previous tests.

“It hasn’t kept us from doing our plans or our goals,” Anderson said. “We can look at our students’ [group] scores, but until the state puts a stamp on that, they’re all preliminary.”

Martin Cook, superintendent of Central CUSD 3 in Camp Point, said the delay has affected the district “tremendously.”

“It’s hard to zero in on school improvement,” he said. “Professional development activities quite often are tied to the test. We have ideas, and there are areas that we’re concerned about, but we still don’t have any real data back.”

In 2004-05, the district failed to show AYP for students in special education districtwide. Cook is anxious to see if the district improved.

The state’s inability to score and deliver test results on a timely basis has also resulted in school report cards

not being released by the Oct. 31 state law deadline. School report card data determine a school’s AYP status under the No Child Left Behind Act.

NCLB requires schools and school districts to make AYP in improving student test scores or face penalties that run from permitting students to transfer to dissolving the school boards of noncompliant districts. The law also requires schools to raise test scores of various demographic groups of students or risk the same consequences that would occur if all students performed poorly. In 2005, 94

“It was very frustrating to everyone because we’re so late and because it’s high stakes.”

— **Becky McCabe, Illinois State Board of Education**

percent of schools teaching Illinois’ 900,000 students hit annual progress targets, compared with 71 percent the year before.

In addition, every Illinois school having at least 45 students in any of eight demographic groups must test at least 95 percent of each group in reading and math.

State, testers blame each other

The state said Harcourt was responsible for testing material errors and delivery delays in the spring that caused schools statewide to delay their testing schedule for up to two weeks. Harcourt says the state was responsible for data entry errors. The Texas-based vendor’s five-year, \$44 million contract to develop and distribute testing materials was canceled in its first year, but Harcourt continues to play a role in test scoring and development.

“We were two months late in getting ISAT scores, so we’re two months late in almost everything we’re doing,” said McCabe. “We have made contractual changes, we have taken this

very seriously. Harcourt has had liability damages.”

Other changes last year included the expansion of testing to include an individual itemized analysis of test scores for every student taking the Illinois State Assessment Test. The number of elementary students tested also increased from 850,000 in 2005 to 1 million in 2006 because testing included students in third- to eighth-grades. Previous reading and math testing was for students in third-, fifth- and eighth-grades. The state also ran up against obstacles in helping school districts implement a new computerized Student Information System.

“This [past] year there were a lot of issues that we had to address,” McCabe said. “It was very frustrating to everyone because we’re so late and because it’s high stakes.”

Just before press time for this *Newsbulletin*, the state posted AYP determinations for elementary, junior high and middle schools, but high school and high school district AYP results were still unavailable. AYP will not be made public by the state until school report cards are publicly posted, according to the Illinois State Board of Education.

What the delay in test results has meant

The state’s failure to process standardized test scores by the statutory deadline has had several major ramifications:

- **Students and parents** were not able to look to the scores to know how students measured up to state standards.
- **Some schools could not use the scores** as planned to adjust curriculum by identifying their strengths and weaknesses in teaching methods.
- **The feds could not use the scores** to determine in a timely way whether a school was subject to sanctions under the No Child Left Behind law, thus causing a delay in schools finding out about sanctions.



Mark Conolly



William Mauser

Two districts lose superintendents to untimely deaths

Two Illinois school districts were recently shaken by the untimely death of superintendents, including William Mauser, 56, superintendent of Meredosia-Chambersburg CUSD 11, and Mark Conolly, 53, superintendent of Hoopeston Area CUSD 11.

Mauser had been in ill health for a couple of months prior to his death on Jan. 9. Conolly died from a massive heart attack on Dec. 16. He was out with his family at a shopping mall when he was stricken by the attack.

"It's very rough, sad and shocking," said Kevin Root, athletic director at Hoopeston. Conolly had been with the district for 30 years and had been the superintendent for eight years.

Mauser had been with the Meredosia district since July. He came to Meredosia from Clay City CUSD 10, where he had served as superintendent since August 2004. Prior to that, he had served for several years as superintendent in Dongola CUSD 66.

Conolly joined Hoopeston schools in 1978 as a teacher. He was promoted to assistant high school principal in 1988 and principal in 1990. In 1998, he was chosen as superintendent.

Finance director and former superintendent Don Dean will act as interim superintendent for the Hoopeston district. Plans for dealing with the superintendent vacancy in Meredosia have not yet been announced.

NEWS HEADLINES

Arlington Heights (Nov. 10, *The Daily Herald*, Arlington Heights) Two years after a newcomer ousted a long-time board member through an unprecedented \$20,000 campaign, incumbents who will be on the ballot next spring are gearing up to wage a similar effort. Incumbents are forming campaign committees, appointing communications gurus and planning to do real fundraising.

Arlington Heights (Dec. 9, *The Daily Herald*, Arlington Heights) The District 214 board questioned whether teens from Maryville Academy would be better served by adjacent Maine Township High School District 207. Legally, Maryville is within Northwest Suburban High School District 214's boundaries, and has been ever since a 1980s vote in the state legislature shifted it there. But geographically, some insist, it still belongs in Maine THSD 207.

Chicago (Jan. 5, *Chicago Tribune*) Mayor Richard Daley said he supports school funding changes in Illinois through a so-called tax swap that would increase the income-tax rate while lowering property taxes. "We have talked about this for 25 years," he said. "The time has come to start the debate anew, seize the opportunity for reform," he added.

Clinton (Dec. 22, *The Pantagraph*, Bloomington) A rise in the tax value of the Clinton Power Station could increase revenue for Clinton schools and other units of local government. Revenue for each taxing body that receives property taxes from the plant should increase by more than 20 percent next year. The taxing bodies have been involved in negotiations with Exelon Energy on an agreement that could double the \$100 million equalized assessed valuation of the plant.

Minooka (Dec. 23, *The Herald News*, Joliet) Minooka CCSD 201 is joining nearby districts in signing

a resolution with the Grundy County Board showing their intent to work with a tax zone to attract new industry, the board announced. Earlier in December, Minooka CHSD 111 approved the same resolution.

Naperville (Nov. 29, *The Daily Herald*, Arlington Heights) A plan in Naperville CUSD 203 to post negotiation updates online passed muster with attorneys but was not approved by the board. The proposal would have made employee contract negotiations more open in an effort to expedite teacher contract talks.

Pekin (Dec. 6, *The Journal Star*, Peoria) Snowblowers proved a cheap and effective way to fix a saggy roof in Pekin CHSD 303 after employees noticed some slight sagging on the district's 1975 Tech Building.

Peoria (Dec. 30, *The Journal Star*) The District 150 truancy center has enough money to reopen this semester after donors contributed about \$650 more than was necessary. District 150 had no choice but to close the center in late December when funding ran out. Meanwhile, the Peoria Area Chamber of Commerce is leading an effort to collect a total of \$120,000 to fund the center for three years.

St. Charles (Nov. 29, *The Daily Herald*, Arlington Heights) The school board announced it is dropping efforts to diversify middle and high school populations while the board is redrawing boundary lines.

Wheeling (Dec. 8, *The Daily Herald*, Arlington Heights) Safety concerns prompted Wheeling Township Elementary District 21 to weigh a plan to allow cell phone use for emergencies, as long as the phones are routinely turned off during school hours. The board reviewed a first draft of the policy on Dec. 7. The current policy prohibits students from using or possessing cell phones and other electronic devices at school.

Geographic representation faces legal challenge

Residents using suit to fight board action

Geographic restrictions on school board membership are being challenged in a Putnam County lawsuit recently filed in a federal district court. Seven Putnam County residents, including former Granville mayor Bob Borri, filed the lawsuit on Dec. 20, seeking to invalidate the sitting school board and force a new election.

The lawsuit filed against the Putnam County CUSD 535 Board of Education aims to block plans to expand and renovate a Hennepin school rather than rebuild a Granville school hit by a tornado in 2004. The lawsuit is challenging the election of the sitting board members under terms of a state law that places a geographic restriction on some school boards' membership. The plaintiffs' main goal is to enjoin the board from making a decision on the Hennepin school.

Experts note that the school board's credibility is not impinged by the lawsuit. But the larger issue is a state law (105 ILCS 5/11A-8 and 105 ILCS 5/11B-7) that allows certain school districts to restrict board membership, for example, to no more than three members from any congressional township. It was enacted in the 1940s at a time when many rural schools were being closed in the state, and thus it was designed to ensure that rural residents would have a voice in consolidated school districts.

The resulting geographic restrictions on school board membership remain relatively common in rural

areas today, experts say, although no precise count has been made of the number of school districts with such arrangements.

But observers say that if the challenge goes to trial the law could be found unconstitutional for failing to meet representation guidelines under the so-called "one man-one vote" doctrine. The territorial limitation is unconstitutional, according to plaintiffs' attorney John Grivetti.

Grivetti, who drafted the lawsuit, says the law conflicts with constitutional guarantees that "the votes of all potential voters have equal weight, and all candidates have an equal chance for election to office."

"You do not stand an equal chance if someone with more votes can't get elected," Grivetti said. "The majority does not have the majority rule."

The U.S. Supreme Court's "one man/one vote" ruling, handed down in the early 1960's, ensures that all legislative and congressional districts in a state must have an equal number of voters. Before that ruling, there were some congressional districts in which 10,000 voters elected a representative, and other districts in which it took 200,000 voters.

A similar situation exists in Illi-

nois school districts today, and even though Illinois law does permit residents of a school district to eliminate territorial representation restrictions through a referendum, it can be virtually impossible to get that done. Under law such a measure must be approved in every township, regardless of the overall vote.

One recent ballot proposal to eliminate territorial restrictions in Bradford CUSD 1, located 35 miles north of Peoria, for example, was voted down in November 2006. Although the overall vote ran heavily in favor of eliminating the geographic restrictions, three sparsely populated rural townships opposed and defeated it.

Will such anomalies end soon? Legal observers say the Putnam County challenge to the state law may never come to trial, because the real crux of the local dispute revolves around sought-after motions to undermine the board's plan to expand Hennepin Elementary School. They say the plaintiffs may drop the constitutionality question if the judge denies the motions they really want.

But even if the issue is not addressed now, it likely will come before the courts again.

IASA preparing for annual state conference in late April

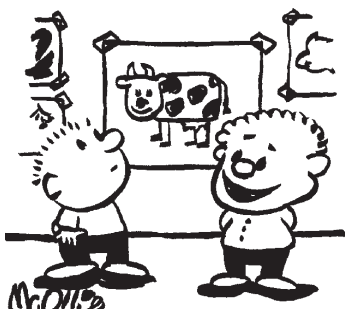
The IASA Annual Conference, scheduled for April 25-27, annually draws more than 650 school administrators to Springfield. Invited to register to attend will be school superintendents, assistant superintendents, state agency staff and college professors of educational administration.

This year's event to be held at the Hilton and President Abraham Lincoln hotels in downtown Springfield presents an excellent opportunity, event organizers say, to establish new con-



tacts, network with colleagues, and meet the IASA staff and board of directors. General sessions and breakout panels will provide up-to-date information on topics relevant to superintendents and other school administrators.

For more information, watch the IASA Web site at: <http://www.iasaedu.org/>.



"I call it 'Moona Lisa.'"



More than 1,000 participants enjoyed the opportunities offered by last year's job fair.

Registration, booths available for 12th annual IASB job fair

The 12th annual IASB Job Fair for Teachers, Administrators and Education Majors will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday, Mar. 17, in the Shannon Center at Saint Xavier University, Chicago. The purpose is to assist districts in finding and hiring qualified teachers and administrators.

The first 11 job fairs identified

hundreds of job applicants at all grade and building levels. The job fair is a chance to meet many of these candidates early in the search process.

To reserve your district's spot in this important event, contact Loretta Cotten at IASB at lcotten@iasb.com or call 630/629-3776, extension 1237. Space is limited and advance registration and a fee are required.

Districts can propose panels for 2007 Joint Annual Conference

The Illinois Association of School Boards is seeking proposals for "Share the Success" panel sessions at the 2007 Joint Annual Conference. School districts and other organizations are invited to submit specific proposals. IASB seeks panel suggestions in any of the following eight categories:

- Governance/Leadership
- Finance and Funding
- Current Issues
- Community Relations and Communications

- School Law
- Facilities/Transportation/Technology
- Best Practices
- Governmental Relations

The 2007 Joint Annual Conference is set for Nov. 16-18 in Chicago. Proposals for Share the Success panels must be received in the IASB Springfield office no later than Feb. 16.

To obtain detailed information (including selection criteria) and the forms necessary to submit proposals, visit: <http://www.iasb.com/jac06/CallforProposals.pdf>.

NEWS FROM IASB

Spring division meetings to feature legislative updates

The IASB spring division dinner meetings this February and March will commonly feature presentations on legislative issues by IASB governmental relations staff.

For more information on these upcoming division meetings — and many others planned for the spring — visit IASB at www.iasb.com/calendar/.

IASB offers recognition for service via awards

IASB annually recognizes people and organizations whose actions have contributed to excellence in Illinois education, with an impact statewide. Recognition is provided through the Harold P. Seamon Award for Distinguished Service to public education. Nominations are sought from now through April 15.

Recipients must have done one or more of the following: displayed exceptional service and commitment; provided innovative approaches to meeting school challenges; or enhanced local governance by boards.

In addition, IASB Honorary Memberships for Exceptional Service are awarded for rendering great service to IASB or to public education.

IASB also offers the IASB Service Award for 25 years of service producing a positive impact through a close affiliation with and direct service to schools, either as an employee or volunteer. Current board members and IASB staff are not eligible recipients.

Submit nominations to: IASB Awards Committee Liaison, 2921 Baker Drive, Springfield, IL 62703-5929, phone IASB, ext. 1139, or fax 217/753-2485.

Geneseo superintendent earns national technology award

When NSBA recently honored educators whom it identified as the "20 To Watch" for heading up the new generation of school technology leaders, the list included Scott Kuffel, Superintendent of Geneseo CUSD 228. In fact, Kuffel was the only school superintendent to receive the award.



Scott Kuffel

To recognize his accomplishments, NSBA presented Kuffel with

a certificate as a part of their Technology and Learning (T+L) Conference's 20th anniversary celebration in Dallas.

Kuffel led District 228 to become one of the first to extensively use IASB's *Schoolboardnet* service, which offers a free virtual community with access to document sharing, posting, instant tabulation of surveys and instant messaging.

All board members, superintendents and board secretaries of IASB member districts are eligible to use *Schoolboardnet*. To learn more, visit <http://www.iasb.com/sbnet.htm>.

FRN from page 3

- Securing changes to the No Child Left Behind Act; and
- Addressing legislation that directly impacts public schools.

Attending this year are seven IASB officers and four staff. School board representatives will include: IASB President Marie Slater, Vice President Mark C. Metzger, and Past President Ray Zimmerman, as well as Elgin board member Joyce Fountain, O'Fallon superintendent Nancy Gibson, Aptakisic-Tripp CCSD 102, Buffalo Grove, school board member Barb Newmark, Plainfield board member Victoria Eggerstedt, and Riverdale board mem-

ber Crystal Pinkney, of General George Patton District 133.

Staff members scheduled to attend are: IASB Executive Director Mike Johnson, Associate Executive Director of Governmental Relations Ben Schwarm, Director of Communications Linda Dawson, and Governmental Relations Staff Intern Zach Messersmith.

FRN organizers say the meeting gives local school leaders an opportunity to make a difference in the education of the nation's public school children, and the ultimate goal of FRN advocacy is to make public education a top priority of the federal government.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February 22 – Illini Division Spring Dinner Meeting, Rantoul THSD 193, TBD

February 26 – Shawnee Division Spring Dinner Meeting, Meridian CUSD 101, TBD

February 27 – Consolidated Primary Election, Elections are held in some jurisdictions but not others

March 1-4 – American Association of School Administrators Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA

March 1 – Egyptian Division Spring Dinner Meeting, Wayne City CUSD 100, TBD

March 1 – Abe Lincoln Division Spring Dinner Meeting, Argenta-Oreana CUSD 1, TBD

March 5 – Casimir Pulaski Day, IASB offices closed

March 6 – Corn Belt Division Spring Dinner Meeting, Iroquois-West CUSD 10, 6 p.m. Dinner

March 6 – Two Rivers Division Spring Dinner Meeting, North Greene USD 3, TBD

March 7 – Central IL Valley Division Spring Dinner Meeting, Washington SD 52, 6 p.m. Dinner



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In School Governance*

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