

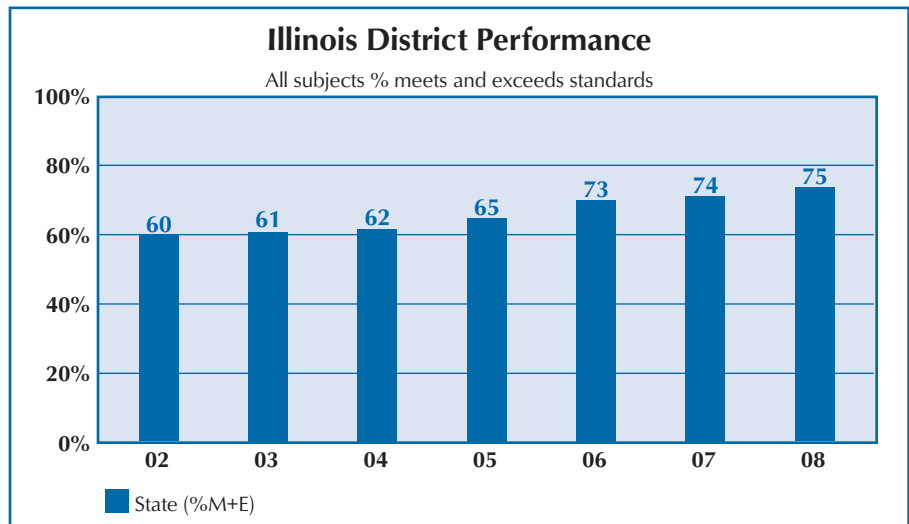
## Ratio of students making AYP rises again

### Sixth straight year of gains seen in test scores

The percentage of Illinois students who meet and exceed state standards on all standardized tests in all subjects combined has risen for the sixth consecutive year, according to figures released in May by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). The figures are intended to measure achievement for students tested in 2008 under the No Child Left Behind Act. (See the accompanying chart at right labeled Illinois District Performance.)

The bad news, however, is that the number of school districts making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in every subgroup of students has dropped for the second straight year. The drop, with nearly 100 fewer school districts making AYP in 2008 than in the previous year, may partly be attributable to the ever-rising bar for standards established under the federal NCLB law. Most educators support the idea of the No Child Left Behind law.

“It draws attention to subgroups that may ordinarily be left behind,” said one district superintendent. “But I disagree with the punitive conse-



quences placed on schools that don't achieve rising goals in every subcategory.”

Most school leaders say they would like to see a better funding stream for No Child Left Behind, and they ask that schools be given more time to achieve the NCLB goals. They say the public perception is very negative, often unfairly so, when a school is placed on the list for not achieving AYP.

Districts with strong academic success all of a sudden find themselves

See **AYP** on page 4



All students and schools must meet state-identified standards under NCLB by 2014.

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**IT  
cuts hurt  
in classroom**

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## Bill to reform State Board terms stalls in committee

Stalled in the legislature at press time was a bill to end the terms of all ISBE board members and give sitting members no more than 90 days to remain in office. The newly appointed members would serve staggered terms through June of 2014 after appointment by the governor with advice and consent of the Illinois Senate.

For future appointments, members would serve for five-year terms beginning on July 1 after appointment (most terms now begin in January) and would commence until June 30 of the fifth following year. The bill also would allow the governor to make temporary appointments.

The legislation came out as an amendment to SB 1333 in late May, and was amended and adopted by the House and placed on the Concurrence Calendar in the Senate for consideration of House changes.

The plan was released after another measure stalled that would drastically change the appointment process for Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) members. The other proposal, HB 80, would create a new process under which the governor, attorney general and secretary of state appoint a seven-member nominating panel to review ISBE applicants and nominees.

The nominating panel under SB 1333 would have 60 days to seek nominees, review them to determine eligibility for oral interviews, confirm satisfactory background checks and conduct public hearings on each individual's qualifications.

The governor's office and Illinois State Board of Education oppose HB 80, along with teacher organizations, mainly because they say there is no clear reason to insert two additional statewide officeholders into the ISBE appointment process.

# Lawsuit challenging state's school funding system clears court hurdle

Education supporters enjoyed their first, tentative courtroom victory, won on April 16, in a lawsuit challenging the state's school funding system. Some say the win is only a first successful fight in what could be years of court battles, but it does come at an important time in state budget talks.

Cook County Circuit Court Judge Martin S. Agran threw out four discrimination counts brought against the state by the Chicago Urban League and its partners in the case; counts that essentially recalled failed arguments used in previous lawsuits. But Judge Agran bolstered litigants' hopes by ruling that a fifth count, which relies on the state's Civil Rights Act of 2003 to claim that the state's funding system discriminates against minority children, contains compelling evidence and deserves further exploration.

Although earlier funding suits never made it past a motion to dismiss, Judge Agran found the more recent Illinois Civil Rights Act provides the legal footing to proceed. "This is important and historic because we passed a milestone no other lawsuit in Illinois has been able to pass," Cheryle Jackson, Chicago Urban League president and chief executive officer, told the *Chicago Tribune*.

Calling it a "major hurdle," she said "this proves that education is the civil rights issue of the 21st Century."

Attorneys for the Urban League in the case include a team led by Lisa T. Seruggs, a partner in the Chicago law firm of Jenner and Block. Seruggs, who is serving as pro bono counsel in the suit, recently told *The New York Times*: "The way the state funds our schools is really disheartening, but now there is reason for optimism."

The court's opinion highlights some disturbing facts from the firm's complaint, including these:

- "Illinois ranks 49th in the nation in the size of per-pupil funding disparity between its lowest and high-



Cheryle Jackson calls ruling a 'major hurdle.'

est poverty districts."

- The per pupil funding wealth in the top five wealthiest districts ranged from \$1.2 to \$1.8 million, while it ranged from \$7,000 to just over \$24,000 in the five districts with the lowest property wealth.
- The "disparity exists despite the fact that low property wealth areas generally pay much higher property tax rates than areas with higher property wealth, and yet they still generate less local funding for their schools."

But experts say the lawsuit could take months, if not years, to litigate. So, looking for a more immediate remedy, advocates hoped that the judge's


See **LAWSUIT** on page 4

*Illinois*  
**SCHOOL BOARD**  
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**Illinois Association  
of School Boards**

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**ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION  
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

# Information technology cuts reduce schooling support

## Understaffing may harm classroom IT applications

How many school Information Technology (IT) departments are not understaffed in these economic hard times? Actual data instead of educated guessing may help administrators, and school boards explain the impact of understaffed IT positions. Such data came recently in a detailed survey conducted by SchoolDude, eSchoolNews, and other technology organizations looking at IT concerns in over 600 school districts.

An executive summary of the survey is available online at: <http://marketing.schooldude.com/marketing/it/2008-k12-it-survey-exec-summary.pdf>.

The essential point, though, is that IT staff now spend too much time at schools fixing things and far too little time planning and implementing new technologies in the classroom.

If school leaders feel like their IT folk spend too much time putting out brushfires, and not accomplishing long-term goals, they are not alone. According to a representative from SchoolDude (and several other outlets, listed at <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/Second-Annual-School-IT-bw-14523264.html?v=1>), staffing shortfalls translate into reduced institution and classroom benefits. They claim:

- 55% reported that 50-100% of their department's workload is spent reacting to technical problems
- Three-quarters do not have enough staff to implement new technologies
- 65% do not have enough staff to integrate technology into the classroom

Administrators are well aware of how extensive the school district's to-do list really is, but how many items on it relate to just keeping the ship from sinking or providing help to individuals? How many relate to making

real change and ultimately improving student learning through technology? Far too many, according to the survey.

The good news, the survey also found, is the growing number of "Software as a Service" vendors, in which a service provider hosts applications and delivers them to users over the Internet. These vendors, IT workers say, are making deployments easier with less need for in-house staff and expertise. Nearly half of the IT survey respondents said they have implemented Software as a Service projects.

Seventy-two percent of those who have taken this path cite its ease of deployment as a key benefit, and 65 percent favor such applications because they require less technical support. On the other hand, fears about data security have exploded in the last year, with 72 percent of those who have tried Software as a Service saying they have concerns about losing control over their data, up from 40 percent last year.

When it comes to district communications, 37 percent of respondents said their districts have a faculty intranet, and another 27 percent are working toward this goal; 38 percent offer secure remote network access, and another 40 percent soon will do so; and 45 percent have implemented student, parent and teacher web portals, while another 39 percent soon will.

Finally, the study also found that a lack of funding, or lack of understanding on the part of school boards, got in the way of achieving long-term school technology goals.

For a summary of survey results, read the eSchool News Special Report on School IT Support at: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/special-reports>.

Or download the full survey report at: <http://www.schooldude.com/survey>. For more information on the results, contact Nick Mirisis, marketing manager for SchoolDude.com, at [nick@schooldude.com](mailto:nick@schooldude.com).



## NSBA's T+L event to focus on leadership

One place to find ways to boost the school district's technology performance is by attending the national T+L Conference, a K-12 education technology conference designed for school district leadership teams. The event will be held Oct. 28-30 in Denver.

Presented by the National School Boards Association (NSBA), T+L is designed for teams of technology directors, superintendents, school board members, district administrators, principals, and lead teachers.

The 2009 conference will focus on these critical issues:

- Tools for engagement
- Technology & the law
- Professional development
- Leadership for innovation
- 1:1 – next steps
- Preparing tomorrow's workforce with S.T.E.M.
- Mission critical IT management

T+L features sessions, workshops, site visits, field trips, exhibits, and networking opportunities, such as:

- Interactive district-led sessions with strategies for integrating technology with a limited budget.

See **T&L** on page 4

## LAWSUIT *from page 2*

ruling might send a strong message to Gov. Patrick Quinn and state lawmakers this budget season.

“This lawsuit helps put the political pressure on legislators to do the right thing,” said state Rep. David Miller (D-Chicago).

Miller and other legislators like state Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago) want funding reforms that ease property taxes for schools while significantly boosting state spending on education. The changes would help alleviate the state’s gross disparities in per-pupil funding between property-rich and property-poor school districts.

Facing a crippling budget deficit, Quinn proposed a major hike in taxes this year. But his budget proposal featured only a modest increase in education funding, although a windfall in federal stimulus dollars was earmarked for education. Property tax relief was not part of the governor’s plan.

Miller says the budget “games are just beginning” and wants to get a petition circulating in the state legislature that would spell out a set of principles and a commitment to education reform.

## T&L *from page 3*

- In-depth workshops and “mini-academies” to delve into key topics and pick-up implementation tips
- Field trips and site visits to see practical, real-world applications of new technologies
- Small group roundtables to explore new ideas and concerns and network with colleagues from across the country
- Inspirational speakers with fresh perspectives on the future of education technology
- Two full days of exhibits to explore the latest products in the field

Registration and housing for the event opened on May 12. To register online visit: [https://secure.nsba.org/register/tl/2009/tlreg\\_welcome.cfm](https://secure.nsba.org/register/tl/2009/tlreg_welcome.cfm).

For more information or to register by phone, call NSBA at 800/950-6722.

## Charles P. Rose confirmed as ED General Counsel: Attorney a true friend of schools

Franczek Radelet & Rose recently announced that founding partner Charles P. Rose has been confirmed by the U.S. Senate as General Counsel for the Department of Education. As a result, the law firm’s name is now Franczek Radelet P.C.



Charles P. Rose

The firm is one of the nation’s largest single-office practices focusing exclusively on labor and employment law and education law. It represents private and public

sector employers throughout the country, including the Chicago Public Schools.

“This is an enormous honor both for Charlie and our firm. It is of course a tribute to Charlie’s talents and experience, but also to the caliber of work by all the attorneys in our education and labor law practices,” said James Franczek, founding partner and president of Franczek Radelet.

At the time of Rose’s nomination earlier this year, Secretary Duncan, the former **Chicago District 299** CEO, commended the firm for its commitment to education.

## State Board announces school breakfast grant monies now available for starting new program

The ISBE recently announced availability of School Breakfast Program Start-Up Grants of \$3,500. The money may be used to assist schools in overcoming some of the barriers associated with starting a new school breakfast program.

Funds can be used to help defray any non-recurring costs (costs related to start-up of the program only), equipment (refrigeration equipment, serving equipment, warming trays,

carts, menu boards, toasters, cereal dispensers, etc), outreach and materials (conference attendance, brochures, flyers, menus, etc).

Any school not operating a School Breakfast Program that agrees to operate one for at least 20 serving days in the start-up year, and three years beyond, may apply.

The application process is available at: [http://www.isbe.net/nutrition/htmls/breakfast\\_state.htm](http://www.isbe.net/nutrition/htmls/breakfast_state.htm).

## AYP *from page 1*

labeled by having one small subset failing. Their perception is negative, but it’s hard to understand it too.

NCLB requires all states to measure each public school’s and district’s student achievement and establish annual achievement targets for the state. The larger goal is for all students, and all subgroups of students, to meet or exceed standards in reading and mathematics by 2014.

Every year the state calculates a school or district’s AYP to determine whether students are improving their performance based on the established annual targets. State law defines consequences for all schools that do not

meet AYP criteria for consecutive years.

Title I schools and districts are subject to additional consequences, including school choice (for more information see the ISBE website at <http://www.isbe.net/nclb/pdfs/FAQ-choiceML.pdf>), supplemental educational services (see the ISBE website at <http://www.isbe.net/ses/default.htm>), and corrective action and restructuring.

For the most current information on AYP requirements see the Illinois Accountability Workbook, online at: [http://www.isbe.net/nclb/pdfs/accountability\\_workbook06.pdf](http://www.isbe.net/nclb/pdfs/accountability_workbook06.pdf).

## Conference for administrative professionals to offer learning opportunities for board secretaries

A conference set for Sep. 24 will aid school district administrative professionals including board secretaries, superintendents' assistants, business office staff, and building office staff. The new conference will be held at the Crowne Plaza, Springfield, with registration and continental breakfast from 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., and the main events running from 8 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.

The keynote presenter will be Laurie Guest, a speaker known for her imaginative ideas and fast-paced, entertaining style. Four breakout sessions will cover 20 different topics, including:

- Electronic board meetings
- Student records

- Freedom of Information Act
- Electronic records and the Open Meetings Act
- Budgeting
- Employee benefits management
- Time management
- Relationship-building
- And more...

The new conference is co-sponsored by the four Illinois school management associations and IGFOA (Illinois Government Finance Officers Association).

Registration information and complete program became available online in mid-June. For more information visit the website at <http://www.illinoispc.com>.

## IASB staff members co-host national conference in Chicago for board policy and governance training pros

The Illinois Association of School Boards staff will co-host this year's joint conference of the American Association of State Policy Services (AASPS) and the NSBA trainers' group during the week of June 22 at the Hyatt Regency Chicago. IASB staff hosted the trainers' group in 2005 and the AASPS in 2007.

The AASPS is organized for the purpose of providing "continuing education" and networking opportunities for state association staff as policy and governance consultants.

The AASPS portion of the conference begins on June 23, with a luncheon at noon immediately fol-

lowed by conference programming, and continuing through a day of joint programming with trainers.

IASB's Cathy Talbert, Associate Executive Director for Field and Policy Services, a former president of AASPS, will welcome registrants from many other states.

The NSBA trainers' portion of the conference begins at 8 a.m. on June 25, with a day of joint programming with AASPS, including a reception and dinner, and it concludes at noon on June 27. IASB's Angela Peifer, Associate Executive Director for Board Development, chaired the trainers' part of the event.

## NEWS FROM IASB

### Love/hate relationship with unions is new Journal topic

Unions ... some people just love to hate them. But unions have contributed immeasurably to society and the middle class as we know it.

In the July/August issue of *The Illinois School Board Journal*, the cover story will explore how we got to where we are in terms of unions and school districts and how this relationship seems to fuel itself.

Also the Journal will present findings from the 2008 school board member survey.

### Conference mailing needs prompt action for housing

June 8 was the mailing date for IASB's 2009 Joint Annual Conference registration packet, which contains valuable information about housing accommodations and registration. Conference planners recommend districts make reservations as soon as possible because demand for housing is always high and the number of rooms at special conference rates goes quickly.

Participating hotels include: Hyatt Regency Chicago (headquarters), Sheraton Chicago (headquarters), Marriott Chicago Downtown, Doubletree, Embassy Suites, Fairmont Hotel, Intercontinental Hotel, the Palmer House, Swissotel, and Westin Chicago River North. Housing rates range from \$151 to \$172 per night, plus taxes.

Now is also the time for local boards to formalize resolutions for the IASB Delegate Assembly. The deadline to receive these legislative proposals was June 24. Resolutions adopted by the delegates at the Joint Annual Conference become official policy of the Association in the coming year.

Registration fees this year will be \$340 if reservations are made by Oct. 16. The Joint Annual Conference will be held Nov. 19-21 in Chicago.



"Paleontology isn't just a lot of bones, Timmy."

# Suburban school segregation concerns alleged by Pew group

## Says many schools don't reflect makeup of district

A small number of suburban school districts in Illinois contain racially segregated schools, according to a Pew Hispanic Center study released this spring.

The study says racial diversity increased over the past 14 years nationwide, but at some school districts that has not meant that students of different ethnicities ended up mixing at greater rates.

The report's key findings:

- Districts: Non-white students at suburban districts jumped to 41 percent in 2006-07, up from 28 percent 1993-94.
- Schools: Non-white student numbers, by school, however, rose only to 25 percent in 2006-07, up from 17 percent.
- Total growth: Latino, black and Asian students account for most of the 3.4 million increase in overall suburban school populations nationwide, the study found.

Suburban districts have become more diverse, but not down to the school level, according to the report.

The study listed one school district in Cook County as the most segregated suburban school district in the nation. It was ranked No. 1 in the nation for the highest black segregation and for the highest Hispanic seg-

regation among suburban districts in 2006-07.

In the year examined in the report, the highlighted district's student population was 49 percent black, 47.5 percent Hispanic and a little more than 2 percent white, according to the Illinois State Board of Education.

However, depending on the individual school, the minority populations skewed heavily black or heavily Hispanic. In five of the district's 10 schools, black students made up 86 percent or more of the student population. At three schools, the Hispanic population was 80 percent or more.

The most diverse school in the district had an enrollment that was two-thirds Hispanic, 19 percent black and 10 percent white. That school also happens to be the top-performing school in the district on state standardized testing.

But school advocates said the Pew report's findings are not a major surprise, and are, in fact, to be expected because schools are a reflection of the communities they serve. School districts have some communities with high concentrations of one or another group, so that shows up in neighborhood schools.

Many educators and researchers have said that more diversity in schools better prepares students for real-life experiences after high school and college. Students who attend schools with

a mix of different cultures and races can more easily adapt to an ever-increasingly global economy, they say.

The Pew study also claims to have evidence for three other benefits of diversity in schooling: 1) helping ensure that schools do not differ in their level of quality or resources available; 2) developing helpful "peer effects," creating more pressure for academic success among all students; and 3) satisfying public demand for the benefits of diversity.

But schools are prevented by recent court rulings from busing students or creating school boundaries for the sole purpose of changing schools' ethnic or racial enrollments.

The popularity of charter schools, now promoted by President Barack Obama, is a factor behind some of the segregation in grades kindergarten through 12, according to report author Richard Fry, a senior researcher at Pew, a Washington think tank. This is because many charter schools have special ethnic themes or offer bilingual courses, and minorities are choosing to enroll in such schools with classmates of the same race or ethnicity.

The study does raise interesting questions, however, about whether local school boards need to actively promote integration, and how the enrollment mix in various schools can be interpreted.

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## Anti-violence study aims at helping schools remain proactive

The country recently recognized the 10th anniversary of Columbine, an event that had a huge impact in the way we look at school crime and safety. The U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics recently released Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2008. The annual report presents the most recent data available on school crime and safety both at and on the way to school.

The report covers topics such as victimization, fights, bullying, classroom disorder, weapons, student perceptions of safety, teacher injury and the availability and student use of drugs and alcohol. It's intended to provide policymakers and practitioners a frame of reference by which they can develop effective programs and policies aimed at violence and school crime prevention.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 55.5 mil-

lion children were enrolled in preK-12 in the 2006-07 school year. In order to ensure safer schools for all of these children, indicators of the current state of school safety must be established. Following are key findings from the 2008 Indicators of School Crime and Safety:

- In 2006, students ages 12-18 were victims of about 1.7 million nonfatal crimes at school, including thefts

See **ANTI-VIOLENCE** on page 8

# NEWS HEADLINES

**Arlington Heights** (May 13, *Chicago Tribune*) Township High School District 214 officials have decided to seek federal funds to help struggling students after years of rejecting money for disadvantaged students. The district is aiming to improve math and reading skills with the funds, but the district's decision to seek the money represents a major shift in policy: "For the last several years, it would have cost more to provide services than we would have received from the federal government," Superintendent David Schuler told school board members. But with the potential Title I grant for the 2008-09 school year growing to \$861,000 from last year's \$255,000, school board members authorized Schuler to apply. The sizable difference was attributed to increases in the number of eligible students and in funding.

**Batavia** (May 14, *Aurora Beacon News*) Batavia children who do not attend local public schools may still participate in school district-run sports, clubs and arts groups, school board members tentatively decided in May. Batavia USD 101 has always allowed home-schooled children who live within district boundaries to join clubs, teams and music groups at the schools they would normally attend. Illinois High School Association rules provide for home-schooled children to compete on local public school teams, Board President Ron Link noted.

**Galesburg** (May 11, *The Register-Mail*) Galesburg District 205 is considering a policy to implement random drug testing after the board of education supported a board committee's plan to compile more detailed data on the topic through surveys. "It's something you want community discussion about," said a committee member. "Our feeling was pretty much every member felt it's

worth talking about the next step."

**Naperville** (May 14, *Chicago Tribune*) An Indian Prairie District 204 school bus driver has been fired after he forced a 13-year-old student to get off a bus recently because she did not have written permission from her school to ride a different bus than usual. Officials for the bus company, First Student, said the driver was fired for violating company policy, which is to pull the bus over and radio dispatch when students board buses on which they don't belong.

**Naperville** (May 19, *The Daily Herald*) Naperville Unit District 203 has softened its disciplinary measures for students caught carrying non-prescription medication at school. Currently students must visit the nurse's office to get their over-the-counter medication and must have the permission of both a physician and a parent. Students found in violation have previously been disciplined under rules which call for suspension or expulsion. The board voted on May 18 to change that, giving more discretion in deciding how harsh the punishment will be for such violations.

**Peoria** (May 11, *The Journal Star*) Peoria District 150 appears poised to take the next step toward authorizing a charter that would allow a not-for-profit group to open a math, science and technology school. It would be a public school and would be considered part of District 150. Students could live anywhere in the school district, and a lottery would choose which students attend. The school would be governed by its own board of directors. The district's school board would set academic and financial standards, but it would be up to the charter school and its directors to meet expectations, otherwise the charter could be revoked. Costs would be low, thanks in part to transitional aid from the state over

the first three years.

**Richmond** (May 20, *Northwest Herald*) A nearly year-long study on whether Nippersink District 2 and Richmond-Burton CHSD 157 should consolidate has found such a merger won't save much money. But the study still recommended a merger, saying it could be an opportunity for the elementary and high school districts to create a more cohesive curriculum. "There would be some minor efficiencies, consolidating things, but I don't think it would have a major impact on the budget," said Donald Johnson, the consultant who conducted the study.

**Statewide** (May 18, *MyWebTimes.com*) ISBE is proposing cutting 50 percent of "hold harmless" funding for next year, then cutting 25 percent in each of the following two years until all the funds are gone. Some legislators are proposing cutting the money 20 percent each year for five years. Either way it will be tough, said Dan Joyce, superintendent of Serena CUSD 2, which would lose around \$518,000 of its \$9 million budget under the ISBE's plan. "My main complaint is that we found out about this after (we approved) our levies (for next school year)," he said.

**Statewide** (April 24, *Chicago Tribune*) Many high school students have the grades needed for college work, but the hurdles presented by standardized tests, scholarship searches, and financial aid paperwork can exclude some students. Now a new college counseling experiment in four schools is trying to change that, as the Illinois College Advising Corps matches university graduates with high schools that need help in getting more students into college. Organizers hope to raise more money to extend the program to eight schools next year and 16 schools the year after.

# Federal grant helping ISBE improve education data infrastructure

## \$9 million grant to aid student data study, use

The Illinois State Board of Education has been chosen by the U.S. Department of Education to receive nearly \$9 million for a statewide Longitudinal Data System (LDS) that is designed to help local districts improve analysis and use of data to better prepare students for success.

One other key aim is to make data more accessible to educators, especially when it comes to helping children reach the standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Illinois has proposed developing an LDS that will collect and maintain individual staff and student data from preschool through college that is linked with school districts across the state.

“The federal grant will allow us to move forward sooner with the LDS. This is one of the priorities the board has identified, and it’s also one of the assurances the Obama administration is looking for from states before they can access stimulus funds,” said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch.

The state currently does not have a standardized system for handling the data it already has to collect, such as the number of students who receive special education or free or reduced-cost lunches.

The state board will receive nearly \$1.2 million during Fiscal Year 2009-10 for activities to support the system’s development. Additional funding will be spread over FY 2011 to FY 2013. Illinois was one of 27 states to receive this competitive grant. The state must submit periodic reports on the development and implementation of its systems.

Illinois has already put into place some of the foundation for a longitudinal data system, including the development of a unique student identification system and collection of student-level data. Moreover, ISBE, along with the state’s higher education sys-

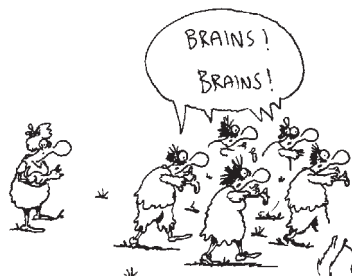
tem, proposed legislation, in Senate Bill 1828, to further promote the development and implementation of an LDS. The bill passed both houses of the legislature and, as of May 18, was headed to the governor’s desk where it is expected to be signed into law.

The federal grant and the pending state legislation will allow ISBE to begin taking the next steps of integrating all ISBE student-level data and connecting it with data from other parts of the agency, including staff data and special education. The LDS would also, among other things, ease the burden of data collection on Illinois’ local school districts and streamline the process of state and federal reporting, according to ISBE.

The requirements outlined by federal officials mark a foray by the federal government into areas that have mainly been the province of states and districts—notably teacher evaluation and the shape of data systems.

As part of the teacher-quality assurance states must fulfill to receive fiscal-stabilization money, for instance, the federal education department plans to demand that states report for each district the number and percentage of teachers and principals scoring at each performance level on local teacher- and principal-evaluation instruments.

After districts have received their federal stabilization funds and used them to offset cuts, the federal grant guidance allows districts to spend remaining funds on a host of activities, including new school construction.



Paris Hilton was left completely unscathed by the zombies.

## ANTI-VIOLENCE, from page 6

and violent crimes.

- Higher percentages of black students (10 percent) and Hispanic students (9 percent) reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property than white students (7 percent).
- In 2005-06, 24 percent of public schools reported that student bullying was a daily or weekly problem. Eighteen percent of public school principals reported that student acts of disrespect for teachers occurred at least once per week and 2 percent reported widespread disorder in classrooms each week.
- Despite the low percentage of principals reporting widespread disorder in the classroom, 35 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching.
- In 2007, 32 percent of students ages 12-18 reported having been bullied at school during the school year. Twenty-one percent said it consisted of being made fun of; 18 percent reported being the subject of rumors; 11 percent said they were pushed, tripped or spit on; 6 percent said they were threatened with harm; 5 percent were excluded from activities on purpose; and 4 percent said they were urged to do things they didn’t wish or their property was destroyed.
- Six percent of students had carried a weapon on school property within the last 30 days, compared with 18 percent who reported they had carried a weapon anywhere, perhaps indicating policies are effective in reducing weapons on school grounds.

It’s the hope of the report’s authors that this data is useful in developing adequate procedures and programs to address school violence and crime. A first step is to compare local district data with the national data and identify areas for focus, experts say.

To download the entire report, visit <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=2009022>.



# Consolidation pushed amid long, steady drop in district count

Before state legislators even think about raising the income tax, they need to force more small school districts across the state to consolidate, according to state Sen. Terry Link (D-Waukegan), who anticipates school consolidation will rise to the forefront in the form of state legislative proposals.

“I imagine this will come up at the end of session when we are looking at a final budget and taxes,” Link said. “This bill may be part of the final compromise.”

But school consolidation is already the trend in Illinois, school advocates say. From Fiscal Year 1984 to Fiscal Year 2009 the number of Illinois school districts has decreased from 1,008 to 870, a reduction of more than 13 percent. The move toward ever greater district consolidation, and other similar forms of school district reorganization, including the annexation of one or more districts by another district, has not stopped.

Although the consolidation trend has slowed a bit over the past decade, there are 28 fewer districts today than ten years ago. And the historical trend toward a dwindling number of school districts in Illinois dates back many decades. Indeed, the first consolidation petition was put forward in 1903.

The first systematic statewide law for voluntary consolidation was adopted in 1919. That law [Laws of Illinois,

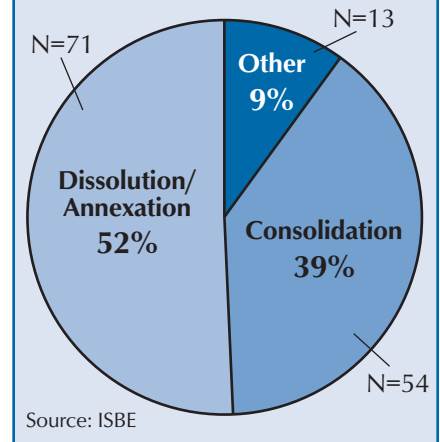
51 G.A.] established a procedure to allow school districts to merge, and to consolidate liabilities and debts, along with stipulations about the selection of a new governing board.

Little consolidation was seen until the Great Depression in the 1930s, according to *The Law and School District in Illinois*, by James E. Herget. According to Herget, “The number of school districts dropped from a high of 12,000 in 1945 (the highest in the nation) to 2,300 in 1955.”

The total number of Illinois school districts has continued to decline ever since. But critics say mergers can cause smaller communities to lose their identity and their voice in what and how their children are taught. They note that education research supports the retention of smaller schools, while distance learning technology can often fill in many of the opportunities once missing in small districts.

But some lawmakers, including Sen. Link, argue there is a growing exasperation among taxpayers toward government inefficiency. “Illinois has more units of local government than any other state. It’s a situation that has hurt taxpayers,” Link said. “In good times they may be willing to put up with it, but these aren’t good times. When it comes to government, people want to get the most for their money – especially when they may be asked to pay more in taxes.”

District reorganization by type FY 84 through FY 09

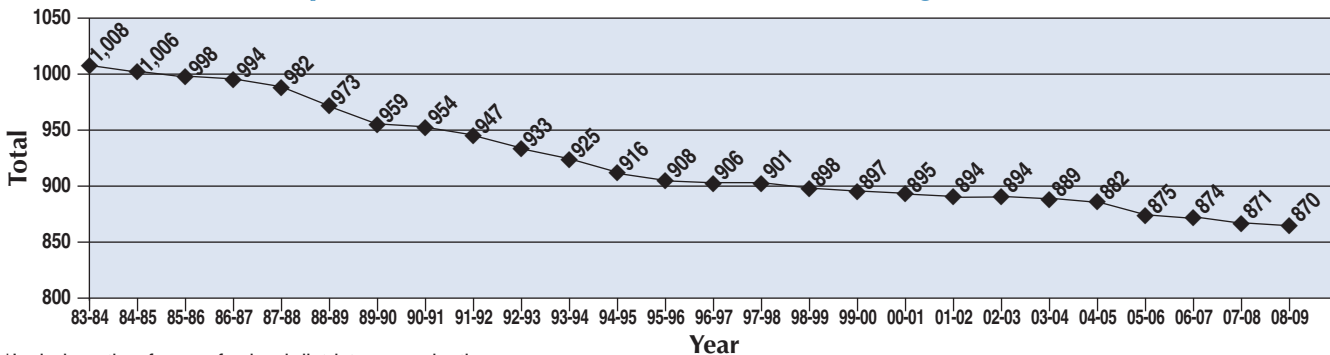


On the other hand, some opponents say lower taxes often fail to be a persuasive argument for community members considering a merger.

William H. Phillips, an associate education professor at the University of Illinois-Springfield, says consolidation currently is not very popular with local voters. “People vote against these mergers because they fear losing local control and community identity.”

Experts on school consolidation agree with Phillips. “Politically, I don’t think this is going to go anywhere,” said Robert Hall, who retired as chairman of Western Illinois University’s education department last year and has studied consolidation issues over the years.

Impact of District Consolidation 1983-84 through 2008-09\*



\*Includes other forms of school district reorganization, i.e. annexation, annexation/conversion and deactivation.

# House Bill 242 would ease pain of costly tax cap index

## School construction tied up in budget battle

A new measure adopted and sent to the governor on May 19 as House Bill 242 (Nekritz, D-Northbrook) provides relief to school districts struggling with revenue limits under property tax caps. The bill provides that the debt service extension base shall be increased each year by the Consumer Price Index percentage increase for the previous calendar year, not to exceed 5%.

For schools this debt includes these funds: health/life safety, working cash, funding and tort bonds.

With the passage of Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL) in the early 1990s, property tax revenues for schools became limited. Generally, levies other than those for debt service on bonds have been limited under PTELL to an annual increase no greater than the increase in the CPI or 5 percent, whichever is less. Debt service levies, on the other hand are locked at a debt service extension base amount equal to that portion of the extension that existed for a taxing district in 1994.

According to the Illinois Statewide School Management Alliance, school districts' ability to maintain capital and infrastructure has been eroded over time. School districts in PTELL counties have seen a 41% decrease in the buying power of their debt extension base because of inflation. The result, school advocates say, was an unworkable erosion of buying power.

This legislation would amend PTELL to provide for an annual increase in the debt service extension base no greater than CPI.

If the bill is signed into law by Gov. Patrick Quinn it would provide the additional benefit of stimulating local economies by providing local capital dollars for projects, capital development and jobs, according to Ben Schwarm, IASB Associate Executive Director.

"It is especially important that school districts find some way to meet

mandatory repair requirements for health and life safety. This measure would allow a little flexibility to meet these mandated repair needs," Schwarm said.

Listed below are other significant bills approved this spring:

- **House Bill 272** (Franks, D-Woodstock) would allow random testing of Illinois high school student athletes during their sports season for steroids and other prohibited performance-enhancing substances. Students who test positive or who refuse to submit to random testing would be banned from athletic competition for an unspecified length of time, according to the legislation, which the Illinois Senate approved 56-0 on May 13. It also would require high school sports coaches to complete an educational program about preventing the abuse of performance-enhancing substances.
- **House Bill 1107** (Eddy, D-Hutsonville) would enable two downstate school districts to raise taxes to replace buildings devastated by natural disasters. The state Senate voted 55-3 to pass the measure on May 14. The bill already had been approved by the House. It affects schools in Martinsville in southeastern Illinois and Benld, located south of Springfield. The Martinsville school was flooded when huge rains fell last summer, while the Benld school was condemned earlier this spring when mine subsidence caused part of the building to cave in.
- **House Bill 493** (Pritchard, R-Sycamore) is an IASB initiative that allows a taxing district to add an explanation of the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law to the Truth in Taxation Notice. Such notice would read: "The taxing district has estimated its equalized assessed valuation to secure new growth revenue and must adhere to the Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL or 'tax cap' law). PTELL limits the increase over the

prior year in the property tax extension of this taxing district to the lesser of 5% or the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which is (insert applicable CPI percentage increase)." The bill passed in the Senate on a 58-0 vote on May 19.

## Construction bills in limbo

In other action, the Illinois Senate approved a package of House bills on May 20 to launch a statewide capital projects program, including funds for school construction. In a rare showing of bipartisanship, the bills passed on the Senate floor shortly after receiving overwhelming support from both parties in the Senate Executive Committee. The capital spending plan has been held up the House, however, short of an anticipated trip to the governor's desk.

The package was held up by parliamentary maneuvers after the governor signaled he would not sign the capital plan unless an acceptable budget plan is also passed.

The \$26 billion program approved by the House in late May would use a hodgepodge of revenue sources to build roads, bridges, and schools throughout the state. Approved were: HB 255, which creates the revenue streams to pay for the bonds, HB 312, which spells out the spending allocations, and HB 2400, which contains the state bonding authority.

Senate President John Cullerton said HB 312 would make available \$1.5 billion to be distributed through the current School Construction Grant Program operated by the Illinois State Board of Education and the Capital Development Board. The 24 districts that have been waiting for their promised state construction funding since Fiscal Year 2002 are specifically listed in the bill as recipients of funds. The rest of the school construction funds are supposed to be distributed through the current criteria and procedures used by CDB and ISBE.

Another \$100 million is available for school district maintenance grants.

# IASB-sponsored programs offer numerous services to school districts

## Sponsored programs

Member districts have access to a number of programs designed to save money or ensure competitive pricing of some essential services. Such programs are sponsored by IASB and offered to districts through pooling or trust arrangements, often governed by the school districts themselves. IASB's sponsored programs include:

- **Illinois School-Based Medicaid Claiming Program.** Accelify brings Illinois school districts a service to greatly simplify the process of claiming federal Medicaid reimbursements. The program's primary objective is to increase the amount of Medicaid funds school districts can recoup for health-related services provided to special education students. Accelify has a history of increasing revenue for districts throughout the country. The program enables the use of Accelify's automated, web-based Service Delivery Log (AcceliDIRECT). The automated billing system allows school district personnel to easily and painlessly record the various health-related services provided to special education students. Accelify handles the rest of the claiming process. For information about the Illinois School-Based Medicaid Claiming Program, call (888) 9ACCELIFY, or visit <http://il.acceliserv.com>.
- **Liquid Asset Fund.** The Illinois School District Liquid Asset Fund Plus (ISD-LAF+) is an investment pool for school districts designed, administrators say, to combine safety with competitive rates of return and fast access to invested funds. Co-sponsored by IASB and other statewide school management groups, it offers certificates of deposit for longer maturities aimed at higher returns. School districts can call toll-free, 1-866/747-4477, to establish accounts or obtain additional information.
- **Unemployment Claims Control.** The unemployment cost control

program is now handled through NSN Employer Services, a management firm based in Illinois that administers this program for IASB member school districts. NSN has been controlling unemployment cost for more than 25 years and claims to provide a high level of personal attention. Fees are determined by the number of employees listed on the district's March 15 payroll. During a recent year, 2,254 unemployment claims were processed on behalf of 254 school districts. For information about this program, call 1-708/478-8051 and speak with Marty Nagle or e-mail at [mnaagle@nsnemployerserv.com](mailto:mnaagle@nsnemployerserv.com). Or visit the NSN Web site at <http://www.nsnemployerserv.com>.

- **Illinois Energy Consortium.** The Illinois Energy Consortium is a joint energy purchasing pool sponsored by IASB and other groups. It is designed to lower utility costs for Illinois districts or community colleges and make funds available for technology, staff development and educational goals. Any district that is interested in IEC's Electric or Natural Gas Programs can contact Ron Steigerwald at 847/567-3051. His fax number is 847/634- 8254 or [rsteigerwald@hotmail.com](mailto:rsteigerwald@hotmail.com).
- **Insurance - Property-Casualty and Workers Compensation.** These include Workers' Compensation Self-Insurance Trust (WCSIT) and Property-Casualty Coverage through IL School District Agency (ISDA). Both the WCSIT and ISDA programs are designed specifically for Illinois school districts. Each pool is controlled by a board composed of Illinois school district administrators, school board members and business officials. There are two programs:
  1. WCSIT says it aims to offer school boards a way to contain the cost of Workers' Compensation coverage. Member districts may receive dividends on premiums

by vote of the trust's board, composed of local school board members and administrators. Members of WCSIT are eligible to receive School Board Legal Liability coverage with limits up to \$5 million. School district treasurer surety bonds and student accident coverage are also available to qualified members. The WCSIT has paid more than \$20 million in dividends and distributions to its members since its inception in 1982. For information about WCSIT, call 1-800/654-9504. Or visit the WCSIT Website at <http://www.wcsit-isda.com>.

2. ISDA offers a line of property casualty coverage for interested member districts. The pooled risk management program is governed by a board of regents composed of school board members and administrators. The Illinois School District Agency (ISDA) provides property/casualty coverage to more than 175 school districts across Illinois. In addition to striving to provide competitively priced property/casualty coverage, ISDA says it gives specialized loss control services and access to property appraisals to assure proper insurance to value coverage. For information, call 1-800/654-9504. Or visit the ISDA Website at <http://www.wcsit-isda.com>.

- **Drug & Alcohol Testing Services.** This IASB-initiated and sponsored Consortium offers a program designed to enable school districts to comply with state and federal drug testing requirements for school bus drivers. Although the program is not governed by an independent board, it was established by the Association staff working in conjunction with the Midwest Truckers Association, which now administers the service. For information, call 217/525-0310.

## National Guard reservists deserve jobs back upon their return, with seniority

School districts that employ National Guardsmen or reservists are legally bound to provide prompt reinstatement to work, train or retrain for job skills, continue accumulation of seniority and job benefits and protect against discrimination under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

Col. Tom Murgatroyd of Springfield, executive director of the Illinois Committee of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), is available to speak with districts or provide additional information regarding rights and responsibilities under USERRA.

ESGR is a Department of Defense agency that seeks to develop and promote a culture in which all American employers support and value the military service of their employees by recognizing outstanding support, increasing awareness of the law and resolving conflicts through mediation.

The agency also provides military leave absence forms, sample letters, service policies and tips to help school districts and others avoid employment challenges. Many of these resources are available on the agency's website at [www.esgr.mil](http://www.esgr.mil).

For more information, contact Murgatroyd at 217-761-3642 or e-mail [tom.murgatroyd@us.army.mil](mailto:tom.murgatroyd@us.army.mil).



Steve Cantrell, board member, **Jacksonville SD 117**, participates in table activities at the first of IASB's 2009 new board member workshops. Additional workshops will be held throughout the summer; check IASB's online calendar of events for dates and locations.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**July 11 – Basic of School District Finance**, NIU, Naperville, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**July 18 – Basic of School District Finance**, Embassy Suites, East Peoria, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**July 25 – Basic of School District Finance**, Holiday Inn Carbondale, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**July 30 – South Cook Executive & Governing Board Meeting**, 6 p.m., location to be determined

**August 6-7 – The Basics of Governance & Law on Board Meetings & Practices**, Doubletree Hotel, Oak Brook, Thur., 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 pm; Fri., 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**August 7 – Comprehensive Workshop for Board Presidents**, Doubletree Hotel, Oak Brook, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**August 8 – Basics of School District Finance**, Doubletree Hotel, Oak Brook, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**August 20-21 – The Basics of Governance & Basics of Law on Board Meetings & Practices**, Crowne Plaza, Springfield, Thur., 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.; Fri., 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**August 21 – Comprehensive Workshop for Board Presidents**, Crowne Plaza, Springfield, 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**August 22 – Basics of School District Finance**, Crowne Plaza, Springfield, 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**August 28-29 – IASB Board of Directors' Meeting**, Oak Brook Hills Resort, Oak Brook