

Illinois SCHOOL BOARD *Newsbulletin*

November 2009 / Issue No. 691

Federal 'Race to the Top' grants being sought: Devil is in the program's details

Race to the Top is a \$4.35 billion competitive fund available from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) for a handful of states prepared to take dramatic steps to improve public education. Under federal guidelines under the \$787 billion stimulus law, formally known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), proposals for use of Race to the Top funds are to be submitted to ED by the governor of each state.



Jon Shure

Beyond certain threshold criteria, in evaluating applications, ED will focus on state performance and plans that focus on these assurance areas:

- 1) College and career-ready standards and assessments;
- 2) Longitudinal data systems to support and improve instruction;
- 3) Great teachers and leaders, equitably distributed; and
- 4) Interventions to turn around low-performing schools.

ED has proposed two phases of

funding: (1) Phase 1 applications are due in December 2009, with awards made in Spring 2010, and (2) Phase 2 applications will be due in late Spring 2010, with awards made in the fall. States that apply in Phase 1 but are not successful may reapply in Phase 2. Most grants will be awarded in Phase 2.

A state must meet two eligibility requirements: (1) it must have an approved application for Phase II stabilization funds, and (2) it must have no legal barriers to linking student

Also see *NCLB future in doubt*, page 7

performance data to teachers and principals.

It appears Illinois will meet both of these criteria. The state is working on its Phase II stabilization fund application, and Illinois lawmakers passed legislation in the spring establishing a longitudinal data system that requires the linkage of student to teacher and principal data.

According to state education officials, Illinois is well positioned to satisfy the criteria for "Standards and

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Illinois school boards hit by cash-swiping 'clampi' computer virus; FBI called in

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is investigating several cases of reported online computer intrusions that have resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars being stolen from at least three school districts in Illinois.

FBI investigators are working on a computer intrusion case at **Crystal Lake CCSD 47**, according to Ross Rice, a spokesman with the FBI's Chicago office. But other school districts believe they, too, may have been hit by the same malicious software, Rice said.

The FBI believes that the so-called Clampi virus, already associated with a rash of banking thefts throughout the U.S., may be to blame, Rice said.

He declined to provide more information on the Crystal Lake case because it is still under investigation, but local reports say that as much as \$350,000 may have been taken from that school district alone.

Schools can take one precaution against such loss by using a dedicated computer, not networked with oth-

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Illinois gets slice of federal education grants to schools

Illinois will receive nearly \$950 million in federal funding to support state-administered programs for teachers and students. The U.S. Department of Education said it is distributing a total of nearly \$22 billion in various formula grants to the states.

The funds are earmarked for improving teacher quality, as well as career and technical education. It will also go to help support students facing the problems of living in poverty.

The money was apportioned among the states based on congressional formulas that take into account items like population, poverty rates and enrollment.

The grants come from the U.S. Department of Education's annual appropriation, not from the recent federal stimulus bill pushed through by the Obama administration.

Guidance issued on use of federal funds to support RtI

The U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has released a PowerPoint presentation that provides valuable guidance on the use of federal funds to support response-to-intervention initiatives.

This guidance clarifies how Title I, as well as Title III funds for English-language learners and Coordinated Early Intervening Services funds under IDEA, may be used to support tiered interventions and progress monitoring in an RTI model without violating the programs' fiscal rules.

The presentation, Implementing RTI Using Title I, Title III, and CEIS Funds: Key Issues for Decision-makers, is available at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleipa/rti/rti.html>.

Five school board members honored as 'Those Who Excel' award winners

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) singled out five school board members for their outstanding service to schools at the 35th annual Those Who Excel/Teacher of the Year banquet on Oct. 24 in Springfield. One highlight of the ceremony was the announcement of the Illinois Teacher of the Year (see story on p. 3).

Two school board members received the Award of Excellence: Mark R. Hosto, **Highland CUSD 5**; and James J. Speciale, **Edwardsville CUSD 7**.

Three school board members won the Award of Merit: Stephanie Duckmann, **Community Consolidated School District 62**, Des Plaines; Ernestine Stover, **Calumet District 142**, Calumet Park; and Dean Reschke, **Naperville CUSD 203**.

"We honor these individuals for their outstanding commitment and contributions to schools across the state. They represent thousands more who support our schools daily and give tirelessly to help students become successful lifelong learners," said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch.

Candidates were nominated by their local schools and people in their communities. The nomination includes

a biography of the nominee, his or her philosophy of education, professional development and community involvement and ideas on the state's most pressing educational needs. Letters of recommendation are also required.

A committee of peers chooses the award winners. It represents statewide education organizations and includes former award winners.

The categories for recognition are:

- Classroom teacher
- School administrator
- Student support personnel
- Educational service personnel
- School board member and/or community volunteer
- Teams
- Early career educator

All three levels of awards were presented at the banquet. There were 44 recipients of the highest award level, Excellence; along with 52 recipients of the Award of Merit; and 66 recipients of the Award of Recognition.

A complete list of award recipients can be found online at http://www.isbe.state.il.us/news/pdf/those_who_excel_list09-10.pdf.

Myriad new laws require attention


School leaders need to be aware of several new laws impacting Illinois schools. IASB's PRESS (Policy Reference Education Subscription Service) is addressing these changes in three separate issues: September 2009, November 2009 and December 2009. The December 2009 issue will contain material from the veto session, other needed updates; and policy implementation for the revised Freedom of Information Act, P.A.96-542, effective Jan.1, 2010.

Illinois
SCHOOL BOARD
Newsbulletin

**Illinois Association
of School Boards**

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James Russell, Associate Executive Director
Gary Adkins, Editor
2921 Baker Drive
Springfield, Illinois 62703-5929
(217) 528-9688
One Imperial Place
1 East 22nd Street, Suite 20
Lombard, Illinois 60148-6120
(630) 629-3776
www.iasb.com


**ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION
OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

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Assessments,” including:

- Joining the America Diploma Project last year, and having been a leader in a multi-state consortium to create common internationally-benchmarked standards and assessments;
- Signing on to develop standards and assessments for 21st Century Skills;
- Creating a plan to make it easier for districts to implement new standards by (1) identifying quality formative assessments and curriculum connected to state standards, (2) developing a platform for sharing best practices, and (3) ensuring affordable contracts for local districts to implement high quality assessments.

But not everyone agrees that Illinois is well positioned to get adequate amounts of Race to the Top funds. That program’s funding is unlikely to produce adequate revenue to maintain high-quality schools, and the distribution formula is questioned by some.

“The total funds distributed to Illinois looks unlikely to be sufficient to overcome anticipated state funding shortfalls for schools, and even then Chicago District 299 would receive nearly half of the state’s share of the funds,” said a school lobbyist.

What is more, critics say that ongoing efforts to use ARRA education dollars to backfill cuts to state education programs has raised concerns that this approach may sink the state’s efforts to snag significant levels of funding.

In fact, ED’s inspector general recently decried the fact that some states are using ARRA funds to plug holes in their education budgets.

“We’re really focused on making sure states are using the stimulus money well,” said Education Secretary Arne Duncan. “But what we want to do is make sure people aren’t playing games.”

The federal education agency has reportedly become increasingly concerned about states playing what it

calls “shell games” with ARRA funds. In at least one case, department officials blocked a state from drawing such stimulus money because it was cutting school funding so deeply.

In its report about how states were spending ARRA funds, the ED inspector general’s office found that over a dozen states are inappropriately using such dollars to replace the money they’re cutting from education. It specifically cited Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

But Connecticut officials say the

“States are facing such a severe crisis that a lot of the federal money is just helping states stay even ...”

—Jon Shure

funds came with the greatest flexibility to help states stabilize their education programs, and that’s how most used those funds. States say they are in compliance as long as they do not cut education spending below 2006 levels. But it is clear that many states won’t be able to maintain that level of funding, let alone boost spending on education, as the Obama administration would like.

According to Jon Shure of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 25 states have cut funding for K-12 education, and 34 have cut higher-education funding. Shure says that the stimulus has covered no more than 30 percent of states’ budget shortfalls.

“States are facing such a severe crisis that a lot of the federal money is just helping states stay even and avoid further budget cuts,” Shure says.

Secretary Duncan warns that if states cut education below 2006 levels and use stimulus funds to plug holes in their education budgets, he may exclude them from billions of dollars that the administration is offering states for reforming their schools.

Chicago instructor Rutter named Teacher of the Year by state

Kevin Rutter, an economics teacher at Carl Schurz High School in Chicago has been named Illinois Teacher of the Year.



Kevin Rutter

Rutter was chosen from 10 finalists at the 35th annual Those Who Excel banquet on Oct. 25 in Peoria. Rutter was among more than 150 educators and school leaders honored by the Illinois State Board of Education as part of the state’s recognition program.

“Kevin’s enthusiasm for teaching really shines through and sets him apart,” said State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch. “Kevin demonstrates a true understanding of the needs of his students which is evident in his dedication to help them succeed both academically and in their extra-curricular pursuits.”

Rutter, a teacher for 11 years, cited his love of learning, his high school history teacher’s intellect and wit and his grandfather’s generosity as factors that have shaped and guided him as a teacher. He said his high school history teacher first planted the notion that he might be suited for teaching and his grandfather inspired him by preaching and practicing the idea that giving of one’s self allows a person to find their true purpose.

Perhaps the biggest surprise Rutter experienced as a teacher was his ability to communicate with teenagers, a skill he may have honed as a middle child who often bridged the communication gap between his older and younger siblings. Whatever its origin, supporters said his personality and skills foster a trust in the classroom, which helps put across his lessons with students. In her nominating letter, Schurz Principal Mary Ann Folino said Rutter is a leader who goes beyond expectations.

More than 30 Illinois school districts represented at NSBA's 2009 technology and learning (T+L) conference

The National School Boards Association T+L (technology and learning) Conference held in Denver, Colorado, Oct. 28-30, featured more than 170 sessions on the latest technology innovations and programs in schools, and administrative offices across the country. Representatives from more than thirty Illinois school districts attended.

Organizers say T+L provides a terrific learning experience for teams of technology directors, superintendents, school board members, district administrators, principals, and lead teachers. This year's conference focused on several critical issues, including:

- Tools for engagement
- Technology and the law
- Professional development
- Leadership for innovation

- Preparing tomorrow's workforce
- Mission-critical Information Technology (IT) management

Illinois school leaders were among conference presenters at various sessions, including two panel sessions presented on Oct. 29 by **Township High School District 214**, Arlington Heights. One covered "Creating and Sustaining the Mission-Critical IT Infrastructure," and was presented by district staff members Keith Bockwoldt, Rudy Gomez and Brian Dichter. Another, "The Digital Language Lab (DiLL)," regarding a software-based program designed for use in the English as a second language classroom, was presented by staff members Rudy Gomez, and Scott Russell.

An Oct. 29 panel session called "Exceptional Professional Development from Exceptional Schools," was

offered by **Avoca School District 37**, Wilmette. It discussed what schools are doing to maintain the high level of employee skills in technology, and was presented by staff members Christopher Brown, and Gail Soriano.

Yet another Oct. 29 session, titled "21st Century Learning with the 3 V's: Visual, Virtual, and Verbal," was offered by staff members Aida Awad, and Hank Thiele of **Maine Township High School District 207**, Park Ridge.

An earlier session, on Oct. 28, titled "Chicago TechCrew: Students Making Technology Work," was offered by Victor Herrera, of **Chicago District 299**.

NSBA's T+L Conference is open to all educators whose public school districts are members of their state school boards associations.

VIRUS *from page 1*

er computers, to transact financial business, according to the Illinois Association of School Business Officials. A new computer, for example, could be used just for finances.

Initially, about \$425,000 was reported missing from District 47, but some of the money was recovered and the unauthorized transactions were stopped, Superintendent Donn Mendoza said.

It was not stolen in one big chunk, but it was a relatively short period of time, within a few days, Mendoza added.

Mendoza said he believes the Clampi virus is responsible for the loss of between \$325,000 and \$350,000 from district bank accounts used to pay for day-to-day expenses.

Since discovering the money was missing in late June, the district has hired an electronic security firm and undergone a comprehensive audit, Mendoza said. Officials already have implemented some of the recommendations in the audit and are in the process of making additional

changes.

Mendoza said the district filed an insurance claim to recoup the lost money, but the matter hadn't been resolved. The insurance company also is investigating, he said.

Sycamore CUSD 427 schools superintendent Wayne Riesen has said that district was hit by a cyber attack in July, but he could not confirm the exact date of when the thefts occurred or how much money was taken.

Three Illinois school districts are thought to have been hit over the summer, but several other school districts nationwide have been targeted by the scam.

Designed to steal banking credentials from its victims, the Clampi computer virus has been an increasingly thorny problem for small businesses and government agencies in the U.S. Investigators say organized criminal gangs based in eastern Europe are moving millions of dollars per day out of the U.S., using Clampi to access bank accounts and then transferring money to unwitting "money mules"

who then transfer the money offshore.

The mules may believe they are helping process payroll for a legitimate company. There is speculation some were hired in response to "work at home" ads.

In August, Clampi was used to steal online banking details for the public school district in Sand Springs, Oklahoma. The attackers later submitted a series of false payroll payments, totaling more than \$150,000.

Late last year, criminals made off with more than \$440,000 after hitting the Western Beaver County School District in Pennsylvania with a similar scam. Western Beaver sued its bank, a small regional institution called ESB Bank, after the district was initially held accountable for the fraud.

The bank apparently was sued because banks usually provide business accounts with multifactor authentication, making it more difficult to hijack accounts. Many banks provide "hardware token authenticators" which add protection.

IASB to demonstrate online learning center at conference

IASB has announced plans for opening its LeaderShop Online Learning Center in the near future. The learning center is designed to help school board members acquire knowledge that can be taught without face-to-face interaction.

Self-paced online courses also will aid board members who are unable to attend regional workshops. Much of the core material that IASB considers essential for effective boardsmanship, however, depends heavily on personal interaction and will not be offered online.

The courses offered through the LeaderShop Online Learning Center will complement those made available at in-district regional and statewide School Board LeaderShop events. Most of these courses will be “electives,” consisting mainly of factual information.

Thus IASB will offer training on the Internet in the comfort of a school leader’s home or district office. “Through this center, you will be able to get continuing education after work, on the weekend, or any other time you can spare a few minutes to view a lesson online,” said IASB’s Associate Executive Director, Board Development/TAG, Angela Peifer.

Learners will be able to work at their own pace, and each course is

self-directed and participants will be able to take up to six months to complete any course. Organizers say registration costs will range between \$75 and \$100 for each of the first three courses that IASB offers. Participants will earn both LeaderShop Academy and Master Board Member credit for each online course they successfully

You will be able to get continuing education after work, on the weekend, or any other time you can spare a few minutes.

complete, depending on the course and its time requirements.

Courses that will be offered initially include:

- School District Labor Relations: What Illinois Law Requires
- Superintendent Evaluation
- Media Relations

To learn more about these three courses, and how you can take advantage of 24/7 availability to meet your professional development needs, watch for announcements at <http://www.iasb.com/>.

Three Illinois districts ranked among tops for use of educational technology

Three Illinois school districts are among the top-ranked districts in the nation in the use of educational technology, according to an NSBA study.

Participating school districts were placed in three categories based on size of enrollment. Winners reflected those districts with the fullest implementation of technology standards.

The Center for Digital Education

hosted a reception for all the ranked districts during NSBA’s T+L Conference in Denver this month. Illinois districts honored, and their rankings in this survey included: **Geneseo CUSD 228** (tie); and **Township High School District 214** (tie). Both of those districts were in the medium-district category (2,501 - 15,000 students).

Avoca School District 37 was honored in the small-district category.

NEWS FROM IASB

School Board Members Day celebration can be extended

IASB again this year offered a comprehensive packet of information online to help districts recognize and celebrate “School Board Members Day” on Nov. 15. The staff produced numerous items to explain about the event and provided a wide array of materials to support it.

But while Nov. 15 is the official day, a celebration of board members can occur at another time if school leaders prefer. Schools can adapt the Illinois-specific materials for use in January, for example, when many state associations throughout the country celebrate board members for an entire month.

The IASB materials for use in celebrating board service are available online at <http://members.iasb.com/>. Available to help organize those activities are:

- A news release for local media
- Tips for suggested activities
- A letter to community groups
- A sample editorial, and more

The observance of the November day came about after Illinois legislators voted in 2007 to designate every Nov. 15 as School Board Members Day in the state.

“IASB thanks all who took part in the celebration for their help in making School Board Members Day a success,” said Executive Director Emeritus Michael D. Johnson.

IASB posts link to online school calendar for 2009-10

The 2009-2010 School Calendar was recently posted online. The calendar is not distributed in a printed version; however, it is posted online to allow for revisions to reflect any new legislation enacted or the correction of any errors. Click on the link at: <https://www.iasb.com/law/cal10.cfm>.

'More creative leadership' one advantage to board self-evaluation

IASB in-district aid focus of updated flyer

Over the summer, IASB field services directors worked to establish goals, including a focus on board self-evaluation services.

The Board Self-evaluation brochure provides information answering several questions: What is a board self-evaluation? What are the benefits? How do we get started?

The brochure explains that "the board self-evaluation process is not an attempt by an outsider to evaluate the board, nor is it an exercise in blame fixing or finger pointing. Board self-evaluation is a means by which a board, as a governance team, steps back and looks at itself, then critically examines its strengths and weaknesses, and makes plans for improvement."

The advantages of boards choosing to participate in such a self-evaluation process are many, according to Field Services Director John Cassel, the lead staff person at IASB for board self-evaluations. "When boards and board members develop a strong commitment to continuously evaluate and improve their processes and work, for example, they are able to provide more creative, decisive leadership for their district," Cassel said.

Lacking such a process, board work may become stale and routine, and bad habits can form, such as a tendency for the board to usurp the superintendent's management role, or a tendency to exclude one or more board members from board deliberations. Interpersonal conflicts and misunderstandings can even arise.

Some other benefits of a board self-evaluation:

- Gathering the perceptions of each board member
- Initiating dialogue among board members
- Analyzing board decision-making procedures, work and processes
- Identifying the next steps for becoming a more effective board
- Providing an avenue for continuous board and district improvement

Getting started

To get started phone IASB and ask for the field services director for your division.

IASB has several options available for facilitating a board self-evaluation. Among the options available are two proven board self-evaluation instruments. Both are available online and as paper and pencil documents. Most boards find the online format to be convenient, efficient and easy.

The process usually begins with the board establishing, in consultation with the Field Services Director, a meeting date for the self-evaluation meeting. A special meeting of 2 ½ to 3 hours often works best. Next, board members individually complete the IASB survey and submit it. The field services director then prepares a report based on the survey results for the board.

The Illinois Open Meetings Act allows boards to meet in closed session for the purpose of self-evaluation "when meeting with a representative of a statewide association of which the board is a member." The board can choose whether to meet in closed or open session.

A fee of \$400 for this service covers all expenses including IASB staff travel and one in-district visit up to four hours. Fees for any additional in-district visits or future workshops requested by the board as a result of this session will be quoted as provided in the Field Services Catalog.

IASB typically conducts about 80-100 board self-evaluations per year and expects to do considerably more than that number this year as boards recognize this opportunity for self-evaluation and improvement.

The updated brochure for this service is available online at: http://www.iasb.com/pdf/bd_self_ev.pdf.

IASB Master Board Member awards earned by 222 individuals

IASB handed out more than 300 school board member awards at division dinner meetings this fall to board members from throughout Illinois. Included were 222 who earned or maintained Master Board Member awards. Additional members got Level I or Level II awards that precede MBM status.

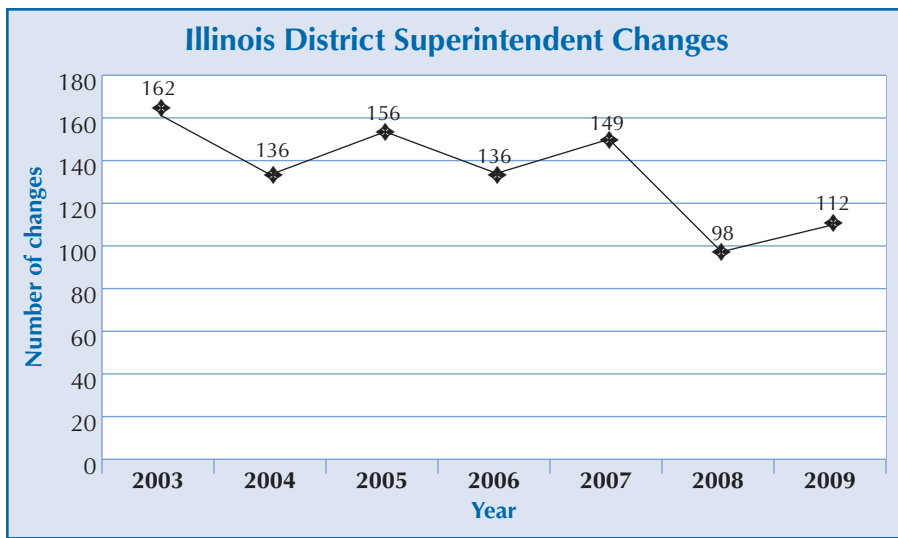
IASB strives to recognize and honor school board members for the time and effort they devote to self-improvement and leadership activities in various IASB and/or NSBA activities within and beyond their local districts.

Awards were handed out at division meetings this fall to recognize the service and participation of school board members in various IASB and/or NSBA activities within their local districts and beyond. Each of these activities is assigned from 5 to 30 Master Board Member credits, depending upon the time commitment involved. Credits are cumulative and individuals are recognized at different milestones as they accumulate these points.

Individuals receiving the Level I designation have accumulated at least 60 credits. Those receiving the Lev-

el II designation have 130 credits or more. Individuals reaching the 200-credit level receive the Master Board Member designation. Thereafter, the master board member designation is maintained by accumulating 50 additional credits each year.

Growing participation in the program has been observed via IASB's Members-Only website, <http://members.iasb.com>. That is the place where individual program participants need to go in order to track their own progress in the Master Board Member program.



Small rise seen in school district superintendent turnover in past year

Illinois public schools encountered a significant increase in superintendent turnover during the past year, according to IASB's executive searches department. Illinois superintendent changes totaled 112 for the year, compared to the 98 superintendent changes in the previous year.

But the latest count of 112 superintendent turnovers is still not particularly high compared to recent years, according to Donna Johnson, Senior Director of Executive Search-

es at IASB. "We are actually a bit down in our total from recent years," Johnson said.

The number of superintendent turnovers averaged 148 per year from 2003 through 2007.

According to IASB records, various superintendent search consultants assisted Illinois school districts in conducting 51 searches during the year; IASB staff accounted for 29, or about 57 percent of the total. In comparison, four private search firms conducted 22 searches.

New state law allows closing some buildings due to health crisis

Public Act 96-0689 added Section 18-12.5 to the Illinois School Code. This new language allows a district to close one or more, but not all, recognized school buildings due to a public health emergency after the district has consulted with a local health department and still claim attendance for that building for General State Aid purposes.

The Illinois State Board of Education in consultation with the Illinois Department of Public Health must determine a public health emergency exists.

Once a public health emergency has been verified for General State Aid purposes, the district may claim attendance for the day(s) that the building is closed based on the average of three days of attendance immediately preceding the closure. You may access further details and information at http://www.isbe.net/funding/pdf/PA96-0689_district_guidance.pdf.

For more information contact Marj Beck at mbeck@isbe.net or phone 217/782-5256.

Future of NCLB in doubt, says U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is seen by many parents as a "toxic brand" that isn't helping children learn, U.S.



Arne Duncan

Education Secretary Arne Duncan said recently, noting that he plans sweeping changes to the Bush administration's signature education effort.

"The first thing that's got to go is the name," Secretary Duncan said.

"Few laws have generated more debate; few subjects divide educators so intensely," Duncan said at a meet-

ing on Sep. 24 with educators, teachers unions, business groups and others on how to revamp the seven-year-old law.

Recently released results from the 2008 administration of the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) suggest that NCLB is not only failing to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students, the results call into question whether NCLB, officially described as "An Act to Close the Achievement Gap," is having its intended effect.

The NAEP results are timely since Congress is currently in the process of rewriting NCLB. As it takes a hard look at NCLB, Congress' interpreta-

tion of the NAEP results and its acceptance or rejection of the various theories explaining those results could influence any revision of NCLB.

NAEP is considered to be among the best measures of students' skills and knowledge. It has been administered periodically since 1969 to a nationally representative sample of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-olds. The latest NAEP results suggest that while the reading and math skills of youth have improved since 2004, the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students has not narrowed.

In reading, average scores increased

See **FUTURE** on page 10

Ottawa high school finds end to strike, other strikes averted

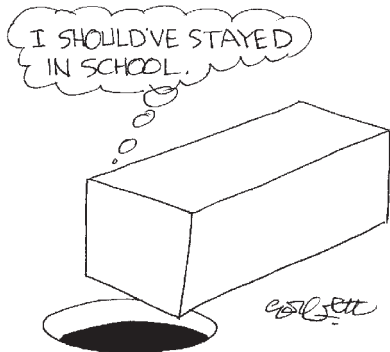
Only one Illinois school district has encountered a teacher strike this year, although six districts received notices of intent to strike, based on data provided by the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board. Settlements have long since been reached in three school districts, namely **Flossmoor School District 161**, **Hononegah Community High School District 207**, and **O'Fallon Township High School District 203**.

Another settlement was reached on Oct. 15 in **North Shore District 112**, in Highland Park, where 450 teachers threatened to go on strike on Oct. 10.

The settlement news was also good in **Ottawa Township High School District 140**, where 110 teachers went out on strike in September. The Ottawa high school district's strike began on Sep. 30, and ended on Oct. 26. Ottawa's troubles were compounded by the tragic news that Superintendent John Harrison died during the strike, causing interim superintendent Matt Winchester to replace him at the bargaining table.

One other district, **Peoria County ROE 150**, has been on notice of an intent to strike since July 2. The district employs 1,150 certified personnel.

Source: Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) Web site at: <http://www.iasaedu.org/>. Follow the Publications link and click on Labor Relations, notice of intent to strike/summary.



IASB's 2009 Cole Awards go to 17 newspapers for best board coverage

An expansion of the number of circulation categories for the 28th annual Robert M.

Cole Awards competition for 2009 resulted in 17 newspapers winning awards in a competition that is part of the Illinois Press Association's "Excellence in News" contest.



Lyle Rolfe

The Cole Awards are sponsored by IASB and conducted by the IPA to recognize newspapers that are doing an outstanding job of covering local school boards.

Winning reporters and their papers, and story topics included:

- **Josh Adams**, *Forest Park Review* (Division A) Good explanation of a school restructuring plan.
- **Lyle Rolfe**, *Ledger-Sentinel*, Oswego (Division B) On school governance concerns in a context of the recession.
- **Mark Malone**, *Morris Daily Herald* (Division D) A look at how the board handled various issues.
- **Sarah Owen**, *Sauk Valley Newspapers*, Sterling (Division E) Explains what was asked of the board and the response.
- **Amy Reiter**, *The News-Gazette*,



Josh Adams



Mark Malone



Sarah Owen



Amy Reiter

Champaign (Division F) On the impact of NCLB on area districts.

Named in memory of the first full-time executive director of IASB, the Robert M. Cole Award recognizes outstanding coverage of education issues that emphasizes the community's connection with its local public school district.

Winners were announced Oct. 9 at the annual convention of the Illinois Press Association. Linda Dawson, IASB director/editorial services, presented plaques to first-place winners.

Members of the IASB communications staff judged the contest.

Conference goers can browse or buy favorite photos taken at this year's events

Members and guests who attend the 2009 Joint Annual Conference will have access to a special online link where hundreds of images taken at the conference will be posted for viewing on a secured third party website.

As an added service to IASB members, those who wish will also be able to order their own prints. They will be available in any size and can be ordered in any quantity.

There is no fee for this member service; however, you will need a password to log in. The website is: <http://momentshare.com/levyphoto/>.

The user name is: iasb09; the password is: chicago.

Note: site will not be active until photos are processed and posted. IASB will announce availability of the gallery as soon as it becomes available, along with instructions on how to access, view or order these photos.

Former Colorado governor eyes best path for superintendents

ISBE advice: share common standards

If it takes 12 steps to get a pilot's license and step three is landing the plane, going past that step without getting it right dooms the entire flight school curriculum.

That was the analogy former Colorado governor Roy Romer used for Illinois superintendents as he outlined four areas that need attention if students and school districts are to succeed. But he also advised that everyone involved with education needs to have a clear definition of what good learning looks like.

Romer, who served as superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District from 2001 to 2006, was the keynote speaker to open the 2009 Illinois State Board of Education's Annual Superintendents' Conference in Springfield.

"In Illinois and in Colorado, we're doing a good job, but not good enough," Romer said. And doing that job better will take close attention to standards, curriculum, teaching and assessments.

"We have to have a set of stan-

dards that are world class," he said, and then develop a curriculum that fits those standards, adding that current math standards are too broad without enough depth to do students the most good.

Saying that some countries make it more difficult to become a teacher than a lawyer or a physician, Romer added that many teachers in the U.S. come from the bottom third of their college classes, not the top third of the graduates as in Singapore and South Korea.

And the current high stakes testing needs to be replaced with periodic, diagnostic assessments.

"We have the opportunity ahead of us in the next three to five years to improve assessments," Romer said, but to accomplish all of this, everyone involved will need to develop the capacity to know what good learning looks like.

State Superintendent Christopher Koch greeted superintendents with a pledge to go on "an unfunded mandate hunt" in 2010 and an acknowledgement that the state is entering an uncharted area as far as finances are concerned.

"We haven't been here before as a state," Koch said of the current economic recession that has state government 74 business days in arrears with payments and 10,506 education vouchers currently unpaid.

He encouraged superintendents to be "fiscally conservative," adding that the way to solve problems like the ones the state faces is "to do the best job you can to anticipate the future."

The day and a half long conference also featured panel presentations on mentoring and induction, a new principal preparation program, strategic planning, response to intervention and school funding formulas, among others.

Closing speaker was Michael Geisen, a middle school teacher from Prineville, Oregon, and the 2008 National Teacher of the Year, who compared education to farming.

"Industrial production in farming has led to a quest for the highest yields possible," Geisen said, and from 30,000 feet the farmland looks really good. However, on closer examination, much of the soil is severely depleted and things don't look as good.

Journal freshens design for 2010 to make way for expanded four-color use

Ad rates for *The Illinois School Board Journal* will increase as of January 1, 2010, but the switch actually offers a better deal for those who advertise on a regular basis.

In raising rates, which have not changed for more than 10 years, the magazine will offer deeper discounts for those who buy frequently and will eliminate all color charges, said Linda Dawson, editor.

"In looking at our rate structure, we realized that we were providing enough incentive for those who choose to advertise with us in every issue," she said. Instead of discounts for three or six issues in a year, the rate structure will reward frequency with a 5

percent discount that builds throughout the year.

From the one-time price, which is lower than the current page price plus full-color charge, the discounts build so that a business that advertises in all six *Journal* issues in a year will save 25 percent off each issue's cost.

Those who have been advertising in black and white will see the biggest increase, she said, but they will have the option now to add full color at no extra charge.

In addition to changing the pricing, *The Journal* will add three premium advertising locations: half of the inside front or back cover and a two-thirds space on the back cover.

"We have not allowed advertising before in what is considered by the publishing industry as 'prime real estate,'" Dawson said. "Copy for the features that currently occupy that space will be scaled back accordingly, or in the case of Tale End, moved into the magazine."

Letters have been mailed to 2008-09 advertisers to let them know of the change. Those who have the biggest increase in cost will be offered the option of a rate freeze for the first two issues if they decide to stay with black and white.

For more information about ad rates, contact Dana Heckrodt at 217/528-9688, ext. 1131, or at dheckrodt@iasb.com.

Primary election date of Feb. 2 a result of 2008 Obama push

Results in earlier 2010 deadlines for policy votes

Are you ready for next year's extremely early (Feb. 2, 2010) primary election?

The state's General Primary Election was moved from the third Tuesday in March to the first Tuesday in February under a law that first took effect in 2008. This change results in earlier deadlines for submitting public policy questions and certification of the same.

In fact, this year Nov. 27 was the last day for the board of education to adopt a resolution putting public policy questions on the ballot at the February 2, 2010 General Primary Election (10 ILCS 5/28-2).

The Annual School Calendar for 2009-2010 was published in August by IASB in order to assist school districts to prepare their local school calendars. It is still available on the IASB website at: <http://www.iasb.com/law/cal08.cfm>.

The calendar is not distributed in a printed version; but it is posted online so that it is available more quickly and allows for revisions to reflect any new legislation enacted or the correction of any errors.

Subscribers to IASB's Online Update [to subscribe mail to: onlineupdate@iasb.com] will be notified of any revisions to the calendar.

Dates contained in the updated calendar comply with all statutory deadlines contained in the Election Code,

School Code and selected acts of the General Assembly. The calendar does not contain dates imposed by the State Board of Education or its regulations.

Public Act 95-0006, effective June 20, 2007, made the primary election date change, which resulted in one of the nation's earliest primary election schedules.

Illinois was one of just six states to hold its 2008 primary or caucus on the first Tuesday in February, and it again will be one of the nation's leaders in 2010.

Insiders say that the 2008 move was made in a presidential election year in preparation for the hotly contested Democratic Party primary race between hopefuls Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton.

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at all three ages since 2004. Moreover, lower-performing 9- and 13-year-olds made significant gains as compared to 2004. But there was no statistically significant change in the white/black score gap since 2004 for any of the age groups. Neither was there a statistically significant change in the white-Hispanic score gap during this period. For all age groups, black and Hispanic students lag behind white students by more than 20 points.

President Barack Obama's administration will develop its proposal for overhauling "No Child" in coming months, after gathering more recommendations, Duncan said. Representatives from more than 160 organizations attended his speech.

"Many teachers complain bitterly about NCLB's emphasis on testing," Duncan said. "Principals hate being labeled as failures. Superintendents say it wasn't adequately funded. But the biggest problem with NCLB is that it doesn't encourage high learning standards. In fact, it inadvertently encourages states to lower them."

The law requires states to measure student achievement through standardized tests. While states can set

their own standards to determine what constitutes an adequate education, schools can lose some federal funds if they don't show yearly progress toward meeting those goals.

Duncan, the former head of Chicago's public schools, is using \$100 billion in stimulus funds as leverage to reshape U.S. education. Almost \$70 billion is going to public education in kindergarten through high school. Most of the education money will go to states under a noncompetitive formula set in the stimulus legislation.

But the stimulus also includes \$4.3 billion in competitive "Race to the Top" grants for states that make the most progress in raising academic standards, tracking student gains, boosting teacher quality and improving failing schools.

"I always give NCLB credit for exposing achievement gaps, and for requiring that we measure our efforts to improve education by looking at outcomes, rather than inputs," Duncan said.

He was generous in his assessment of what the Bush administration did well when it crafted the legislation.

"There is something very important that they did right," he stressed, "and that is the disaggregation of data" – the requirement that schools separate out the test-score results of minority students. A school whose minority students don't make gains on standardized tests will ultimately face sanctions under NCLB.

Duncan called this focus on teaching to all students "a foundation" on which the Obama administration would continue to build.

He did not have many other kind words about NCLB, however, saying that he hopes to essentially turn the law on its head. The law, he says, kept the "goals loose but the steps tight." He hopes to see a law that keeps the "goals tight but the steps loose."

When Duncan speaks of "tight" goals, he's also referring to his push for states to adopt national education standards. He says he sees the status quo – different states working toward "different goal posts" – as unacceptable. But he stresses that he is not interested in interfering with the ability of states and local education leaders to create their own curricula.

NEWS HEADLINES

Chicago (Oct. 2, *Southtown Star*) Chicago Teachers Union president Marilyn Stewart says disruptive students should be removed from regular classrooms and placed in a separate school until they are ready to behave. "Chicago needs an effective alternative school for chronically disruptive students," Stewart told the City Club of Chicago. "These students need separate placement so they can learn to manage their behavior and to get the education they need and deserve." Both Illinois and Chicago District 299 already have some alternative high schools, but they are geared toward students with specific behavioral problems or criminal behavior. Chronically disruptive students are just supposed to be sent to the principal's office, and this is not working, Stewart said.

Elgin (Sep. 24, *The Daily Herald*) Several long-term substitute teachers in Elgin Area School District U-46 were sent home in September. The teachers were let go because of their status as retired teachers, district officials say. According to district spokesman Tony Sanders, if retired teachers come back to work for 20 days or more, they then get placed back onto the teacher's salary schedule. Their pay rate would then increase from \$90 a day to \$386 a day. The substitutes would also have to receive prorated pay at the higher rate back to the first day that they started.

Gurnee (Sep. 26, *The Daily Herald*) Higher standards for all four years would begin with this year's freshmen class if Warren high school's plans gain state approval. Warren Township High School District 121 filed the new plan in response to state education officials over accusations it treated students differently for testing purposes last spring. The state claims Warren improperly prevented 150 of 1,000 juniors from taking

the Prairie State Achievement Exam because they did not meet increased eligibility criteria. Warren board members last year approved an administration recommendation that students must have earned 11 credit hours by the fifth semester – up from eight – and completed other requirements to take the Prairie State exam in April. In July, the state ordered Warren to lift this more rigorous requirement. District 121 officials maintained the plan had been approved by the state education office. District 121 officials have stressed the more challenging academic standards were not devised to prevent poor students from taking the Prairie State exam to boost annual report card scores.

Olympia Fields (Oct. 1, *Southtown Star*) A Frankfort-based technology firm is suing Rich Township High School District 227, claiming the district failed to pay more than \$200,000 for work on the district's phone systems. The lawsuit also claims that a former district building and grounds supervisor demanded a kick-back before he would pay the company. The lawsuit claims the district approached the firm about installing phone systems in September 2007. The company began work on the project in August 2008, but when pressed to get the work done more quickly, the company asked the district for approval to pay workers overtime to complete the project, the lawsuit said. The suit also said the district approved the overtime. After the work was completed, it said, the district paid the company nearly \$150,000 but refused to pay another \$227,000 the company had billed. District officials flatly deny the allegations.

Ottawa (Oct. 1, *The Times*) Ottawa Elementary District 141 officials have received good news from the Federal Emergency Management Agency about the future of flood-devastated Central School. After an appeal

of an earlier ruling, the district has been awarded approximately \$12.3 million from FEMA for "an improved building project," said Superintendent Craig Doster. After assessing the damage from severe flooding in September of last year, FEMA released a repair estimate for the school of just under \$2 million. But, citing a pattern of damage due to flooding at that location, area congressional representatives supported an appeal of this estimate. The district also hired a private consultant and the appeal ended in favor of the district. Students are now attending classes in an overhauled Wal-Mart building.

Peoria (Oct 05, *The Journal Star*) New grading procedures this fall have made 50 percent the new zero when it comes to grades in Peoria District 150 schools. Among the changes was moving to a 10-point percentage scale: 90 to 100 is an "A," 80 to 89 a "B," and so on. But that means 50 percent to 59 percent is an "F." The previous grading scale set a failing grade from zero to 69 percent. Officials said the new grading scale and many of the amended procedures were committee recommendations. For students who have made an effort, the lowest grade the district is asking teachers to give students is 50. If students are not making an effort, however, zeros or other grades below 50 can be given. Also new: suspended students are to be given a zero.

Statewide (Oct. 1, *The Daily Herald*) A new report shows the state lags behind most others in closing the achievement gap between various socioeconomic student groups. The Washington D.C.-based Center on Educational Policy's report, "Are Achievement Gaps Closing and Is Achievement Rising For All?," found "insufficient progress," with gaps widening in a number of areas. A change regarding which students get tested may be partly to blame.

Board member volunteers at FRN event can join with peers to lobby the Congress

School board members can join with their peers nationwide to lobby their members of Congress in Washington, D.C. from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2, 2010.

That's when the 37th National School Boards Association's Annual Federal Relations Conference will be held. During this legislative conference participants will learn in-depth federal issues affecting schools, hear from education experts and political pundits, and lobby members of Congress.

This Congress will be grappling with issues such as:

- Federal funding for key programs like Title I and special education
- Revising No Child Left Behind

- Teacher Quality
- Voluntary Preschool

FRN members aim to influence the outcome of national debate due to their own understanding of how to make federal policy work in the local setting. "You will not want to miss it," said IASB Assistant Director of Governmental Relations Susan Hilton.

The ultimate goal of your FRN advocacy is to make public education a top priority of the federal government. Interested school board members are encouraged to stop by the legislative booth at the Joint Annual Conference later this month to discuss this event and participate in this federal advocacy program.

Second 'Gus' book makes its debut at conference

"Gus," the custodian at Eastside Grammar and popular columnist in *The Illinois School Board Journal*, has a new compilation of his work, with help from IASB.

Still in the Boiler Room will debut at the Illinois Principals Associations conference in October, and will be offered through the IASB Online Bookstore and at the IASB/IASA/IASBO Joint Annual Conference in Chicago.

The 122-page book contains 33 columns from the past 12 years of *The Journal*. The columns have been organized by chapter themes.

"Boiler Room" columns are written by Richard W. Smelter, a retired school principal who is currently an adjunct faculty member for Oakton Community College in Des Plaines.

The book can be ordered online for \$8.95 at <http://www.iasb.com/shop/>.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

December 1 – Blackhawk Division Winter Governing Meeting, The Cellar, Geneseo

December 1 – Two Rivers Division Winter Governing Committee Meeting, Lonzerotti's, Jacksonville

December 2 – Abe Lincoln Division Winter Governing Committee Meeting, IASB, Springfield

December 3 – Central IL Valley Division Winter Governing, Jonah's Seafood House, East Peoria

December 3 – Southwestern Division Winter Governing Committee Meeting, Ramada Inn, Fairview Heights

For more current information, see www.iasb.com/calendar/

