



Illinois State Board of Education

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Gery J. Chico
Chairman

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

August 2014

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I hope that you enjoyed summer with your families and that you and your children are excited to begin the new school year. I invite you to join me and the Illinois PTA for a **Back-to-School Webinar at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 9**. I look forward to updating you on some important statewide education initiatives as research continues to show that when families are involved in the learning process at home and school, their child is more likely to succeed. You will find the webinar registration information at the end of this letter.

Across this large and diverse state, teachers are implementing lesson plans and instructional approaches to meet new, higher learning standards that encourage a greater depth of knowledge in English language arts and mathematics and emphasize critical thinking, problem solving and sharp verbal and written skills. These new Illinois Learning Standards set uniform benchmarks for schools across the state and in collaboration with other states so that U.S. students are better prepared to compete and collaborate with their peers across the world in the 21st century.

In spring 2015, a new state testing system will debut for third- through eighth-graders and high school students in certain courses to gauge how well students have mastered these learning standards at each grade level and whether they're on track for college and careers. And now, with the recent federal approval of a waiver to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Illinois is moving ahead to track and report more meaningful student and school academic data, implement the best intervention practices for the neediest schools, and support effective teaching and leadership.

What does all this mean for your child and school? It essentially means that students need support to master English language arts and mathematics and to learn how to apply real-world skills. It should mean students are highly engaged in learning through a variety of high-quality classroom lessons, collaborative tasks and projects. It means they will take state assessments that reflect their classroom experiences, which will generate information to drive improvement.

It's important to note that Illinois has been working to raise the bar for teacher and leader effectiveness. We've set more rigorous requirements for educators, calling for teaching candidates to meet some higher performance criteria before they enter their education preparation programs. Principals must also be experienced instructional leaders, not simply building managers. These efforts have received local and national acclaim and complement the flexibility waiver, which calls for a gradual rollout of comprehensive teacher evaluations.

[Under state law](#), districts can choose the best assessments from a pool of national, state, districtwide or classroom-specific tests to evaluate teachers. Standardized test results are not determining whether a teacher keeps or loses their job. We believe that a strong, comprehensive and reasonable evaluation system best

supports principals and teachers as they do their important work with our more than 2 million public school students in classrooms each day.

This year, Illinois will again offer our award-winning, consumer-friendly 2014 school, district and state Report Card (<http://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>), which offers facts about school progress, advanced courses and extracurricular offerings to showcase the unique qualities of our schools. The Education Commission of the States recently identified Illinois as having the best report card out of all 50 states and the District of Columbia and we're proud that the commission found it informative for both parents and researchers.

The Report Card also features results of our statewide survey of school climate and learning conditions, called the Illinois 5Essentials. The survey responses from students and teachers can be used as another tool for school improvement.

We are entering a new day in education, but we believe that we are truly putting policy in place for a better future. If you have questions about any of these initiatives, we encourage you to talk with your local teachers and school leaders. Thank you for all you do to support your child on their educational journey. We wish you and your families a safe, engaging and productive school year, and I look forward to connecting with you on Sept. 9 at our Back-to-School Webinar.

Reserve your seat at <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/185876249>.

We suggest listeners log in a few minutes early to establish connections, especially if this is your first time attending a live "Go to Webinar" from your computer or mobile device. We will begin transmitting a title screen at least 15-20 minutes prior to the scheduled 7 p.m. start so that participants can determine that they are properly connected.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christopher A. Koch". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education