

Illinois Schools Win No Child Left Behind Waiver

Written by Katie Hickey
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Federal Government Approves Flexibility Needed for Successful Implementation of State Strategies to Improve Student Learning

CHICAGO – After pushing for more than two years, Governor Pat Quinn and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) announced today that Illinois has won approval from the United States Department of Education for its request for flexibility from parts of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law to improve the quality of education for Illinois' schoolchildren. The approved waiver gives Illinois needed flexibility to continue its progress in implementing a comprehensive strategy to improve education in Illinois by closing achievement gaps, supporting our most challenged districts and preparing all students for college, career and beyond.

"Today's approval is a big step forward that will allow Illinois to do what's best for our kids and improve the quality of education throughout our state," Governor Quinn said. "In 2011, we enacted landmark education reform that made our schools stronger and more accountable. Now, with this federal approval, we will continue to improve the quality of education in Illinois and better prepare our students to be successful in college, career and beyond."

Illinois has moved forward already with many elements of the waiver, including the adoption of college and career ready learning standards in English, Language Arts and Mathematics in the summer of 2010. In 2011, Governor Quinn signed landmark education reforms that strengthened accountability in our schools and training for teachers, administrators and school board members. The historic measure set clear standards for teacher evaluations and prioritized performance above tenure. These reforms represent unprecedented statewide

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agreement on issues that continue to be unresolved across the nation.

“The best economic tool a state can have is a world-class education system, and that’s why we have been fighting to get this done since day one,” ISBE Chairman Gery Chico said. “Schools across Illinois are already putting in place many elements of our plan for student success and this approval will allow us to fully implement our comprehensive plan to make Illinois’ education system the best in the nation.”

The approved waiver also calls for a new state and district accountability system. Illinois will implement a multiple measure system that look at an entire school and district, not simply a test score. In addition, the Illinois accountability system calls for a renewed focus on closing achievement gaps, turning around the lowest-performing schools, building capacity for school improvement and enhanced transparency.

“We still believe that a top priority must be for Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but short of that, a waiver does allow us to move forward and work with local districts to do what’s best for students,” State Superintendent of Education Christopher A. Koch said. “Despite the delay in our waiver approval, Illinois educators have moved forward with elements of our plan and the commitment to college and career preparedness for all students, including the implementation of new, internationally benchmarked learning standards and 21st century assessments of student learning.”

The federal education law has been due for Congressional reauthorization since 2007. In the absence of reauthorization, President Obama announced in September 2011 that the administration would grant waivers from NCLB to qualified states.

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