

Center for the Study of Education Policy  
Illinois State University

Illinois State Superintendent's Survey 2004: Analysis and Findings

Dr. Norman Durlinger, Illinois State University  
Dr. Erika Hunt, Illinois State University

Illinois State University  
Center for the Study of Education Policy

STATEWIDE SURVEY OF SUPERINTENDENTS, SPRING 2004

In 2004, Illinois State University sent a survey out to every school district superintendent in the state with the intent of capturing their perspectives on a variety of timely issues. The respondents to the survey totaled 435 of a possible 889, leaving a 48.9% return rate. All percents are valid percents of responses to the questions where missing responses are not considered in the percent reported.

A similar process was followed in 2002. The content of those surveys addressed the same major topics, although the questions varied. Accordingly, this series of surveys is not intended to develop a longitudinal data base, but rather a “snapshot” of perspectives of Illinois superintendents during a specific period of time. The results of the 2002 survey can be found on the web site for the Center for the Study of Education Policy at:  
<http://www.coe.ilstu.edu/eafdept/centerforedpolicy/downloads/2002superintsurvey.pdf>.

The 2004 survey included four parts: Part I consisted of questions related to demographic information; Part II asked questions related to current state issues; Part III asked questions pertaining to evaluation of superintendents and principals; and, Part IV solicited information regarding state and local finance. The remainder of this paper summarizes the responses of superintendents within each of these four parts.

**PART I: DEMOGRAPHICS**

To begin, the survey asked superintendents to describe their districts and themselves. Table 1 below outlines some of the personal characteristics of the superintendent respondents and their districts.

Table 1  
Personal and District Characteristics

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Percentage</b>		
Gender	82% Male	18% Female	
Race	98.6% Caucasian	<1% Latino/African American	
Level of Schooling	47% Doctorate	46% Certificate	7% Masters Plus
School Type	51.5% Unit	14% High School	34.5% Elementary
State Level Support	82% Foundation	7% Alternate	10.2% Flat Grant

While the demographic questions outlined in Table 1 help to paint a picture of the characteristics of superintendents and their districts, another set of questions helped to outline the career paths of the superintendent respondents.

The responses to this set of questions revealed that the years that superintendent respondents spent in their current positions varied from a range of under one year to 33 years. On average though, the respondents spent 5 years in their current position. The average contract length was 3.3 years. When asked ‘how many years have you been a superintendent?’, the average response was 9 years, indicating that most superintendents served in superintendent positions in more than one location. The average superintendent spent the majority of his or her career in education. The superintendent respondents, whose average age was 53 years old, reported spending an average of 28.8 years in education. Table 2 displays the results of these groups of questions.

Table 2  
Professional Longevity of Superintendent Respondents

<b>Traits</b>	<b>Years</b>
Average Years in Current Position	5 Years
Average Years as a Superintendent	9 Years
Average Years in Education	28.8 Years
Average Years of Age	53

## PART II: CURRENT ISSUES

Superintendents are constantly bombarded by state, federal, and local issues, many of which are beyond their control. This section of the survey asked questions related to current issues affecting the work of superintendents.

### State and Federal Issues

#### State Board of Education Services

Governor Blagojevich in his 2004 State of the State Address acknowledged the “giant bureaucracy” that the state’s K-12 education system has become, a system that places barriers on helping districts to improve student achievement. These barriers, according to the Governor, require local teachers, superintendents, and principals “to waste valuable time that could be better spent on instruction”. In an effort to operate a more efficient and effective system of education, the Governor proposed passing legislation that would remove all administrative powers and responsibilities from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and place them in a Department of Education located under the Governor.

In response to the Governor’s proposal to reorganize the state’s Board of Education, a survey question asked superintendents where they felt current services provided by the State Board of Education should be placed. In response, 67.5% of superintendents felt that the current services should remain with the State Board, while 29.6% felt that the services should go to Regional Offices of Education and local districts. 2.7% of superintendent respondents felt that some of the services should go to

the Governor’s Office and less than 1% felt that all of the services should go to the Governor’s Office. The results of this question are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3  
State Board of Education Services

Question	N	%
Remain within the State Board of Education	280	67.5
Have their responsibilities shifted to the Regional Office of Education and local districts as appropriate	123	29.6
Have most of their responsibilities shifted to the Governor’s Office	11	2.7
Have all their responsibilities shifted to the Governor’s Office	1	0.2

### No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has had an undeniable impact on the schools in this state. To better identify where schools are struggling with meeting NCLB requirements, the survey asked superintendents what items of the Act had the most impact on them and their districts. Table 4 shows that the *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirement* received the most responses (58.6%), followed by *analyzing disaggregated data* (24.9%), then the *requirement of providing highly qualified teachers* (10.5%), and, lastly, the *safe school requirement* (6%).

Table 4  
No Child Left Behind Act

Response	N	%
AYP Requirements	24.9	58.6
Analyzing disaggregated data	104	24.9
Highly qualified teacher requirement	44	10.5
Safe School Requirement	25	6.0

### OBSTACLES TO LEARNING

NCLB has brought increased national and state attention to raising student achievement for all students. However, many variables account for a district’s ability to improve student learning. Recognizing these barriers, the survey asked superintendents to rate their first and second choices on the greatest obstacles to student learning in their districts. Table 5 shows their first choices and Table 6 indicates their second choices. Socio-economic conditions, rules and regulations, and state laws were perceived as the three greatest obstacles to student learning in both tables.

Table 5  
Obstacles to Student Learning-- First Choice

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Socio-economic conditions	197	46.6
Rules and regulations	73	17.3
State laws	68	16.1
Unions	44	10.4
Parents	30	6.9
Boards of education	9	2.1
Religious groups	1	0.2
Community members	1	0.2

Table 6  
Obstacles to Student Learning-- Second Choice

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Rules and regulations	132	33.6
Socio-economic conditions	78	19.8
State laws	72	18.3
Parents	56	14.2
Unions	46	11.7
Board of education	5	1.1
Community members	3	0.7
Religious groups	1	0.2

### Regional Office of Education (ROE) Services

Over the past five years, a debate on the importance and effectiveness of the Regional Offices of Education (ROEs) has received significant attention by the state media. Considering the attention to this issue, a question was included in this survey that asked superintendents their perceptions on the usefulness of ROEs. As shown in Table 5, ninety percent of the respondents stated that the Regional Superintendents provided either highly valuable or some valuable services.

Table 7  
Regional Office of Education Services

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Performs highly valuable services in a competent and professional manner	305	70.3%
Performs some valuable services but improvements in the quality of services are needed	87	20.0%
Does not perform as well as could be expected and should be improved or eliminated	20	4.6%
Could easily be eliminated given their current level of service	22	5.1%

### Professional Development Services Needed by the Superintendents

Professional development requirements for superintendents mandated by NCLB and the present state certification renewal process requirements in Illinois present challenges to school leaders. Acknowledging this challenge, superintendents were asked what professional development services were most needed. According to the responses, advertising available professional development activities presented the greatest need (70%). The second, third and fourth most needed services also appeared in over 50% of responses. These needs included: to provide best practice programs to administrators and teachers (65%); to provide aligned professional development activities for district teams (administrators and teachers) (52%); and, to provide data-informed decision making seminars (50%). Table 6 displays the complete responses of superintendents to this question.

Table 8  
Professional Development Services Needed by the Superintendents

<b>Activities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Advertise activities	305	70.1
Provide best practices (research, instr.) to admin/teachers	282	64.8
Develop team-based aligned professional development	228	52.4
Provide school improvement, planning, and data disaggregating seminars	218	50.1
Provide services for creating and writing best practices” professional development activities for schools/and or districts	188	43.2
Develop custom assessment and performance indicators	164	37.7
Develop education programs for legislators	152	34.9
Develop administrator or board retreat programs	143	32.9
Provide a speaker’s bureau	124	28.5
Develop custom research projects for schools or districts	101	23.2
Develop community/school educational programs	98	22.5

## Certification Board Appointment

The State Teacher Certification Board (STCB) sets policy and procedures for certification for both teachers and administrators. The method of selecting STCB members continues to be a controversial issue. When asked who should make appointments to the state certification board, 46.2% of superintendents felt that this decision should be made by the State Superintendent, 24.8% felt that members should be selected by professional education associations, 21.7% felt that they should be elected by professional educators, 4.4% felt that they should be selected by the Governor, and 2.9% felt they should be elected by the general citizenry of the state. Table 7 shows the number and percentage of responses to the question.

Table 9  
Certification Board Membership

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Determined by the Governor	18	4.4
Elected by the general citizenry of the state	12	2.9
Selected by the professional education associations	102	24.8
Determined by the State Superintendent	190	46.2
Elected by professional educators	89	21.7

## Local Issues

### Issues of Supply and Demand

Reflecting on other issues affecting the superintendency, the survey asked superintendents questions about the supply and demand of highly qualified candidates for leadership and teaching positions. Fewer than half of the respondents reported that they expected the supply “pipeline” to be adequate. While some 11% indicated that they were confident that internal candidates would be available, fully 45% indicated that the supply was not adequate. Table 8 displays responses regarding supply and demand outlined by superintendent respondents.

Table 10  
Issues of Supply and Demand-Principals

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Not at all—supply is adequate	188	43.5
We have a number of adequate internal candidates in the pipe line	50	11.6
To some degree—the pool of available candidates will not be what it should be	146	33.8
To a great degree—a limited recruitment pool with few qualified candidates	48	11.1

In addition to the lack of adequate principal candidates in the “pipeline”, the superintendent respondents identified other positions difficult to fill. Among administrative vacancies in the respondent’s districts, the toughest position to fill was that of high school principal followed by the business manager and then the middle school principal. Table 9 outlines areas of supply and demand in administrative positions.

Table 11  
Areas of Supply and Demand-Administrative Positions

<b>Position</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
High school principal	179	48.9
Business manager	22.3	26.5
Middle school principal	60	16.4
Elementary school principal	17	4.6
Assistant superintendent for instruction/curriculum	9	2.5
Assistant superintendent for personnel	4	1.1

Among teaching positions, the superintendent respondents reported that special education, mathematics, and science teachers were the areas of greatest need for personnel (see table 10 below). This corresponds with a report that identified subject matter specialty shortages published by the State Board of Education in its most recent report to the General Assembly (Illinois State Board of Education, 2003).

Table 12  
Areas of Supply and Demand-Highly Qualified Personnel

<b>Position</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Special education teachers	119	34.0
Math teachers	46	13.1
Science teachers	43	12.3
Modern language teachers	32	7.4
Vocational education teachers	22	6.3
Bilingual teachers	18	4.1
Librarians	18	4.1
Counselors	17	3.9
Reading specialists	14	3.2
Social science teachers	6	1.4
Language arts teachers	5	1.1
Psychologists	4	.9
Intermediate teachers	3	.7
Primary teachers	2	.5
Social Workers	1	.2



## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Illinois is among the states with the lowest graduation requirements in the nation. According to a recent study done by Achieve, Inc. (2004), Illinois has one of the lowest requirements in English, math, and science among the 50 states. When asked what lawmakers should do regarding the current student course requirements for high school graduation (3 years English, 3 years Math, 2 years Social Science, 1 year of Science), 53.7% of superintendents indicated that the requirements should be left unchanged. However, 18.9% supported adopting college core requirements for all students, 13.2% supported increasing math and science requirements for graduates, and 9.1% supported increased courses, but allowing counselors to determine which courses.

Table 13  
Response to Increasing Graduation Requirements

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Leave requirements unchanged	224	53.7
Adapt a college core requirement for all students	79	18.9
Increase the number of specific courses in math and science for graduation	55	13.2
Increase the number of courses required but allow guidance counselors to determine the pattern of courses taken in order to meet the minimum	38	9.1

## CONSOLIDATION/ANNEXATION RECOMMENDATION

Over eighty percent of the school districts in the state are experiencing deficit spending (Illinois Association of School Boards, 2003). Due to the financial difficulties of the districts, administrators and local boards of education have had to decrease costs, which correspondently limits educational opportunities to students. When district's fiscal conditions are severe enough, administrators and boards are forced to develop strategies for decreasing costs and eliminating programs. One of those ways might be through consolidation or annexation.

When asked if the superintendent recommended to the local Board of Education that a consolidation/ annexation study should be considered, 63% of superintendent respondents said no (38.9% strongly disagreed and 24.1% disagreed).

Table 14  
Superintendent Recommended a Consolidation/Annexation Study to ISBE

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Disagree	166	38.9
Disagree	103	24.1
Agree	85	19.9
Strongly Agree	73	17.1

When asked if a Board of Education member recommended a consolidation/annexation study, 64.8% of the superintendent respondents indicated that the board members in their district did not.

Table 15  
District Board Recommended a Consolidation/Annexation Study to ISBE

<b>Response</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly Disagree	184	43.5
Disagree	90	21.3
Agree	90	21.3
Strongly Agree	59	13.9

### PART III: EVALUATION

Many resources (e.g., standards) are used by the State Board of Education and professional organizations to develop leadership standards for administrators. These standards, which direct professional development and evaluation of administrators, set measurements of quality for which school leaders should aspire. Since these standards are instrumental for quality leadership, it is important to determine if they are being used for that purpose. To assess that, this section asked specific questions related to school's districts evaluation processes.

#### Superintendent Evaluation

When superintendents were asked whether they had a performance-based clause in their contract, 90.7% of superintendents reported that they did have such a clause. 92.1% of superintendents also reported that their Board performed an annual formal evaluation of their position. Only 5% of superintendents reported that their Board did an evaluation more often than annually and 2.9% reported that their Board performed a less-than-annual evaluation. Table 16 shows the formal evaluation timelines of superintendent responses.

Table 16  
Formal Evaluation Timelines

<b>Evaluation Timeline</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Annually	383	92.1
More often than annually	21	5.0
Less often than annually	12	2.9

Table 17 shows the various processes that Boards of Education use for superintendent evaluations. The superintendent's responses show that 66.6% of the Boards of Education are not knowledgeable of the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards (IPSLs) for superintendents. Of those who responded to the survey, 83.3% of their evaluations are based on an instrument or a predetermined process. 70% of the

respondents stated that their Boards of Education do not consider the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards for superintendents in their evaluation. The ISAT or PSAE tests are not considered by the Boards of Education in 46.8 of the superintendent’s evaluations. Merit pay is not considered in part of the superintendent’s evaluation process by 65.6% of the districts.

Table 17  
Superintendent Evaluation Processes

<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
The Board is knowledgeable about the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards for superintendents	N=77 18.4%	N=202 48.2%	N=125 29.8%	N=15 3.6%
There is an instrument or predetermined process used in the evaluation of the superintendent	N=23 5.5%	N=47 11.2%	N=210 50.0%	N=140 33.3%
The Board considers the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards for superintendents in the evaluation of the superintendent	N=79 18.9%	N=217 51.9%	N=104 24.9%	N=18 4.3%
A portion of the superintendent’s evaluation is based on the district-wide improvement of ISAT or PSAE test scores	N=76 18.1%	N=162 38.7%	N=155 37.0%	N=26 6.2%
The Board, as part of the evaluation process, determines merit pay for the superintendent’s performance	N=112 26.7%	N=163 38.9%	N=110 26.3%	N=34 8.1%

### Principal Evaluation

Principals and superintendents are allowed to have multi-year performance contracts. The survey indicates that 53.4% of the principals have such contracts. While 92.1% of superintendents reported that their Board performed an annual formal evaluation of their position, the superintendent respondents reported that a similar percentage of principals (87.5%) are evaluated annually. 10.1% of principals are evaluated less than annually and only 2.4% of principals are evaluated more often than annually, as indicated in Table 18.

Table 18  
Formal Evaluation Timelines

Evaluation Timeline	N	%
Annually	322	87.5
More often than annually	9	2.4
Less often than annually	37	10.0

Of the superintendent respondents, 89.9% (54.2% agreed, 35.7% strongly agreed) stated that they were knowledgeable about the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards for principals. Regarding the evaluation of principals by superintendents, 81.4% of superintendents agreed (55.1% agreed, 26.3% strongly agreed) that the superintendent/supervisor considers the Illinois Professional School Leader Standards for principals in the evaluation of the principal(s). 96% (51.7% agreed and 44.3% strongly agreed) agreed that the superintendent/supervisor makes the principal(s) aware of the criteria that will be used in the evaluation prior to the evaluation. The respondents were almost split (52.6% agreed and 47.3% disagreed) on whether a portion of the principal's evaluation was based on the improvement of ISAT or PSAE test scores. 70% of superintendents disagreed that merit pay was a by-product of the evaluation process for principals, as opposed to 30% who agreed.

Table 19  
Principal Evaluation Process

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The superintendent is knowledgeable about the IPSLS for principals	N=4 1.0%	N=36 9.1%	N=214 54.2%	N=141 35.7%
The superintendent considers the IPSLS for principals in the evaluation of the principal(s).	N=9 2.3%	N=64 16.3%	N=216 55.1%	N=103 26.3%
The superintendent makes the principal(s) aware of the criteria that will be used in evaluation prior to the actual evaluation.	N=4 1.0%	N=12 3.1%	N=203 51.7%	N=174 44.3%
A portion of the principal's evaluation is based on the improvement of ISAT or PSAE test scores.	N=41 10.4%	N=145 36.9%	N=164 41.7%	N=43 10.9%
Merit pay is a by-product of the evaluation process for principals.	N=108 27.5%	N=167 42.5%	N=82 20.9%	N=36 9.2%

## IV: FINANCE

With the downturn in the economy in Illinois, many school districts are having to make difficult financial decisions. The last section of the superintendent's survey related to the fiscal conditions of schools. Accordingly, this section focuses on questions directed at learning what are superintendents' perceptions about their district's need for additional finances. As well, this section includes questions designed to determine trends that are occurring in deficit spending.

### PERCEPTIONS OF DISTRICT NEED

The General State Aid Formula is a foundation approach to funding that is based on three separate calculations depending on the amount of property wealth of the local school district (Illinois State Board of Education website, [www.isbe.net](http://www.isbe.net)). When superintendents were asked if the current foundation formula would work if adequate funds were allocated and distributed to local school districts, 52.6% agreed with the statement (12.8% strongly agreed and 39.8% agreed) while 47.4% disagreed (16.0% strongly disagreed and 31.4% disagreed). On the other hand, when asked if money distributed through the foundation formula should be adjusted for regional differences in cost of education if the foundation formula were adequate, 68.5% responded in agreement (17.9% strongly agreed and 50.6% agreed), while 31.5% disagreed (9.1% strongly disagreed and 22.4% disagreed).

The State Aid Formula has a mechanism to provide additional funding for the impact of poverty in the district (ISBE web site). In 2003-2004, the low income count used to calculate General State Aid was changed from the census count to a count of students receiving services from the Department of Human Services (DHS). To prevent districts from being severely impacted by this change, a hold harmless provision was enacted that hold those districts harmless to the 1997-98 General State Aid levels. When asked if there should be a hold harmless component for the poverty grant provision in the General State Aid formula even though the Foundation Level would be lowered, 61.4% of superintendent respondents agreed (22.2% strongly agreed and 39.2% agreed) that there should.

Interestingly, according to the superintendent respondents, a \$250 increase in the main General State Aid grant per pupil would not be enough to cover rising costs (e.g., teacher salaries, health care, retirement). 47% of superintendents indicated that if the General State Aid Foundation Level continues to increase \$250 a year for the next three years, their district would need to lay off staff. 44.3% indicated that if the General State Aid Foundation Level continues to increase \$250 for the next three years, their district would need to have a tax rate increase referendum.

School funding was a debated issue during the 1997 legislative session when Governor Edgar proposed a reduction in local property taxes supporting schools, accompanied by a provision to increase some state taxes to offset the revenues to school districts. Although the legislation was voted down, the debate continues on whether

funding for schools should be more reliant on local or state resources. When the superintendents were asked if they would support a decrease in property taxes and an increase in income tax, 84% of respondents indicated that they would. This response shows that the desire for reform in the state’s funding system for schools is still strong.

Only 11% of superintendents responding to the survey were in districts that had approved Working Cash Fund Bonds this year, for the first time in the last 5 years. This is an indication that although many of the school districts are experiencing deficit spending, a large percent are not using the process of long term borrowing through Working Cash Fund Bonds as a means to pay for operating expenditures.

Table 20 (below) summarizes the responses (combining the strongly agree and agree responses and strongly disagree and disagree) to the state funding questions.

Table 20  
State Funding in Illinois

Question	Agreed	Disagreed
Would the finance formula work if adequately funded?	52.6%	47.4%
Should money distributed to schools through the foundation formula be adjusted for regional differences?	68.5%	31.5%
Should there be a hold harmless provision for the poverty grant in GSA even if the foundation level is lowered?	61.4%	38.6%
If the GSA foundation level continues to increase at \$250 per year for the next three years, my district will need to lay off staff	47%	53%
If the GSA foundation level continues to increase at \$250 per year for the next three years, my district will have to have a tax referendum	44.3%	55.7%
Would your district support an increase in the income tax with a corresponding decrease in property taxes?	84%	16%
Has your district approved Working Cash Fund Bonds this year for the first time in the last five years	11%	89%

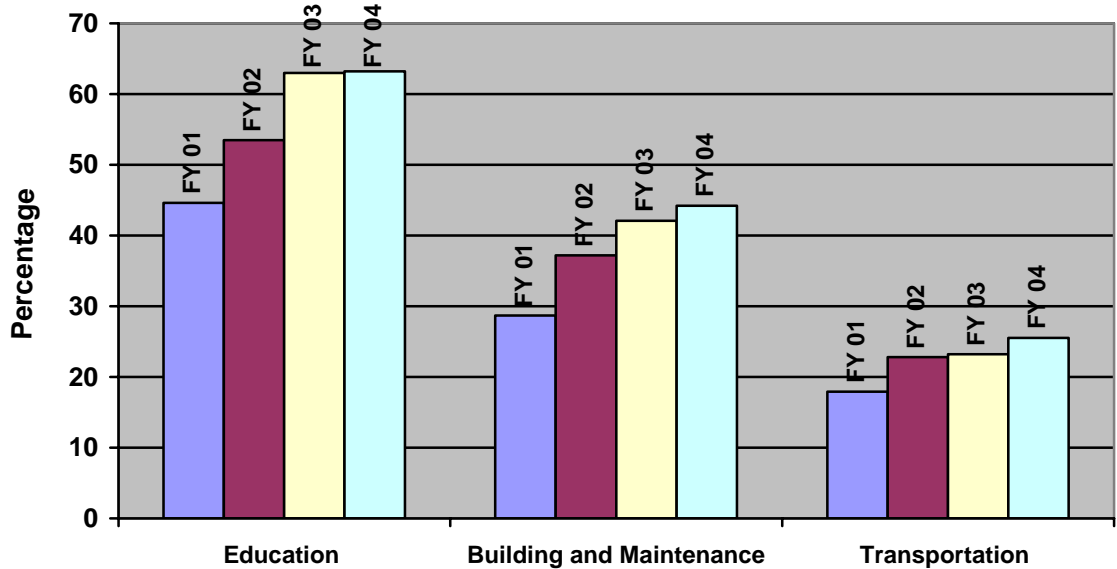
### DEFICIT SPENDING

As indicated earlier, school district deficit spending is at an all-time high (Illinois Association of School Boards, 2003). To understand the ramifications of district’s deficit spending, a question in the survey asked superintendents to mark the areas in their operating funds that demonstrated a deficit. Table 21 indicates the number and percentage of districts operating in a deficit, while Chart 1 displays the areas marked by superintendents, while

Table 21  
Deficit Spending by Fund

Type of Fund	FY 01	FY 02	FY 03	FY 04
Education Fund	N=194 44.6%	N=232 53.3%	N=274 63.0%	N=275 63.2%
Operation & Maintenance Fund	N=125 28.7%	N=162 37.2%	N=183 42.1%	N=192 44.1%
Transportation Fund	N=78 17.9%	N=99 22.8%	N=101 23.2%	N=111 25.5%

Chart 1  
Percentages Marked of Operating Funds Variables That Demonstrated a Deficit



One question asked the superintendents if a foundation level of \$5,000 is sufficient to meet the programming needs of their district. Of those responding, 83.0% did not agree that a \$5,000 foundation level would be sufficient (34.4% strongly disagreed and 48.6% disagreed). Only 17% agreed (1.9% strongly agreed and 15.2% agreed) that such a foundation level was sufficient.

### HIGH AND LOW PERFORMING SCHOOLS

Whether or not low performing schools should receive additional monetary incentives to aid in improving student achievement is a debated issue within the policy circles (Christie, K. and Ziebarth, T., 2000; Kelley, C., Odden, A., Milanowski, A. and Heneman, H., 2000; Ziebarth, T., 2002). Questions were asked in the survey to determine Illinois superintendent's views on this.

Responding to this question, 54% of superintendent respondents agreed (39.9% agree, 14.4% strongly agree) that low performing schools should receive increased funding as shown in Table 22. When asked if high performing schools should receive increased funding, 66% of the superintendents disagreed (16% strongly disagreed, 50% disagreed; 26.9% agreed and 7.1% strongly agreed).

Table 22  
High & Low Performing Schools

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Low performing schools (as measured by state tests) should receive increased funding from the state.	N=41 9.7%	N=153 36.1%	N=169 39.9%	N=61 14.4%
High performing schools (as measured by state tests) should receive increased funding from the state.	N=68 16.0%	N=212 50.0%	N=114 26.9%	N=30 7.1%

### Summary

The results of this survey show the perceptions of Illinois superintendents on a wide range of current federal, state, and local education issues. The results also give the views of superintendent participants on a variety of timely policy issues. Accordingly, the timeliness of this survey provides a useful venue for state policymakers (including the Governor’s Office, the legislature, the State Board of Education, and professional organizations) to use the data to guide decision making in the next legislative session when revisions to the Illinois School Code, changes in rules and regulations, and changes in school consolidation laws and finance policies, among other issues, will be debated.

Some of the major findings, with recommendations for improvement are listed below. The findings are listed according to the four categories in which the survey was structured.

### Findings

#### Current Issues:

- In regard to the NCLB legislation, superintendents reported that Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements and analyzing disaggregated data will have the most impact on school districts. Discussions should occur among policy makers on how to better aid school districts to conduct and support these two activities.
- According to the findings, while the greatest reported obstacle to student learning was socio-economic conditions, the second greatest obstacle was state laws, rules, and regulations. This finding is timely considering the Governor’s efforts this year to streamline the rules and regulations of the Illinois School Code. According to



these findings, streamlining the rules can remove a significant obstacle that school leaders feel impacts student learning.

- Two-thirds of the responding superintendents have not recommended to their boards that they should discuss the possibility of having a consolidation/annexation study, even though the numbers of districts experiencing deficit spending has increased in the last four years. Initiatives should be made to increase the exploration of consolidation/annexation by administrators and boards of education to potentially decrease costs and increase student educational opportunities.
- Regional Offices of Education are perceived by superintendents to perform valuable services in a competent manner. Based on the perceptions of these superintendent respondents alone, the conclusion can be made that superintendents feel the responsibilities given to the regional offices are performed well. Budgetary support from the state should reflect the positive roles and performance of the ROEs.
- A majority of the superintendents stated that lawmakers should leave the graduation requirements unchanged. However, further investigation in this area is still needed. Based on this, the recommendation is made to support a statewide study of graduation requirements and standard Prairie State Achievement Exam (PSAE) performances that would fully investigate whether there is a need to raise high school graduation requirements.
- The majority of superintendent respondents recommended that appointments to the Certification Board should be determined by the state superintendent.
- Superintendents responded to a question asking what they would like a statewide clearinghouse for professional development to include, if one were developed. According to their responses, a statewide clearinghouse for professional development should include the following activities:
  1. advertise statewide professional development sessions;
  2. provide seminars in best practice, research, and instruction to administrators and teachers;
  3. develop aligned professional development activities for individuals, administrators and teachers (through a team approach); and,
  4. provide additional school improvement, planning, and data disaggregation seminars.

#### Supply and Demand:

- The supply of principal candidates is adequate to some degree; however, the pool of available candidates is still not what it should be. Initiatives to improve the quantity and quality of available candidates (e.g., through legislative initiatives as well as local grow-your-own programs) should be developed by both state policymakers and local districts.
- High school principals and business managers are the areas of administration that are the most difficult to find. As far as staffing, the most significant staffing shortages for districts are with special education, math, and science teachers. Based on this finding, as well as a similar finding by the State Board of Education (2003), the conclusion can be drawn for an increased need in state supported

university-based initiatives designed to increase the recruitment and availability of candidates for these administrative and staffing positions.

Evaluation:

- Boards of Education are not perceived by two-thirds of the superintendents to be knowledgeable about Illinois Professional School Leader Standards, yet they have the responsibility of evaluating the superintendent. Considering this gap, it appears that initiatives are needed, as promoted by the state as well as professional organizations, to improve board of education's knowledge of these standards.
- Forty-three percent of the superintendents and fifty-three percent of principals have evaluations based on the district-wide improvement of state test scores. Considering the already wide incorporation of test scores in superintendents' and principals' evaluations, the question can be posed as to whether all superintendents' and principals' evaluations should include a component based on state test scores?
- Over sixty-five percent of the superintendents and thirty percent of principals have a merit pay incentive system within the superintendent' or principal's evaluation. This raises the recommendation for a study that compares districts with merit pay incentives to those without these incentives in their evaluation criteria.

Finance:

- Fifty-two percent of the superintendents stated that the current foundation formula would work if adequate funds were allocated and distributed to local school districts. This finding shows that almost half of the superintendents surveyed do not have faith in the present foundation formula.
- Almost seventy percent of the superintendents felt that money distributed through the foundation formula should be adjusted for regional differences in cost of education. Based on these two findings, policy makers should examine superintendent's concerns about past and present school funding formulas, as well as the feasibility of formula adjustments for regional differences in the cost of education.
- On a similar note, almost eighty-four percent of the superintendents responded that they would support the increase in the income tax with a corresponding decrease in the property tax. Policy makers should determine the reasons for this so that future discussions on taxation can take into account the concerns of the superintendents.
- Policy makers should be made aware of the last four year trend of increased numbers of districts having to deficit spend in at least one of their operating funds categories and take this information in consideration when determining financial support for education this year.
- Fifty-three percent of the superintendents stated that increasing the General Foundation Level \$250 a year for three years would not keep the districts from staff lay-offs. Policy makers should be made aware of this fact prior to the implementation of a new foundation level.

- Over forty-eight percent of the districts have not used Working Cash Fund Bonds over the past five years even though more districts have deficit budgets. Prior to the deliberations on financing education for the next year, policy makers need to study why eleven percent of the districts are having to use Working Cash Fund Bonds for the first time in five years.
- Sixty-one percent of superintendents felt that hold harmless for poverty grants should occur even though the foundation level would be lowered. The State Board of Education should study and report to the superintendents in the state the financial ramifications of this concept to all districts in the state.
- Eighty-three percent of the superintendents responding stated that a foundation level of \$5,000 is not sufficient to meet the programming needs of their districts, nor is a \$250 per pupil annual increase. Policy makers should be aware of the financial needs of the districts prior to determining the foundation level for the next year.
- Fifty-four percent of the superintendents stated that low performing schools should receive increased funding from the state while thirty-four percent of the superintendents stated that high performing schools should receive increased funding. Policy makers should be educated on the concerns of the superintendents on both of these issues before incentive are considered to either types of school districts.

#### References

Achieve, Inc. (2004). *The expectations gap: A 50-State Review of High School Graduation Requirements*. Washington, DC: Achieve, Inc.

Christie, K. and Ziebarth, T. (2000). *Reporting, rewarding and sanctioning schools and districts*. *State Education Leader*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Illinois Association of School Boards (2003). *The education year in review: 2002-2003* (Retrieved on January 10, 2005 from <http://www.iasb.com/files/year0203.htm>).

Illinois State Board of Education (2003). *Educator supply and demand in Illinois*. Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education.

Kelley, C., Odden, A., Milanowski, A. and Heneman, H., (2000). *The motivational effects of school-based performance awards*. (CPRE Policy Briefs No. RB-29). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Consortium for Policy Research in Education.

Ziebarth, T. (2002). *Rewards and Sanctions for School Districts and Schools*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.