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**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AMONG
THE OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR ROD BLAGOJEVICH,
THE ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION, AND
THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION FOR
THE ILLINOIS COLLEGE AND WORK READINESS PARTNERSHIP**

I. INTRODUCTION

This Memorandum of Understanding establishes a partnership among the Office of the Governor Rod R. Blagojevich (Governor's Office), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Foundation), to develop and support State policies and programs that ensure Illinois students are prepared for college and work.

Each partner has demonstrated a commitment to addressing college and work readiness. The following efforts serve as examples of this commitment:

- *Governor's Office:* Governor Blagojevich successfully led the effort to increase Illinois' high school graduation requirements for the first time in more than 20 years; has supported policies leading to increased rigor in high schools; and has proposed the formation of a P-20 Council to better address the linkages between secondary and higher education.
- *Illinois State Board of Education:* ISBE has focused on college and workforce preparation by selecting high school reform as a Board emerging issue, and by adopting as a central component of its strategic plan the goal of fostering 21st Century literacy skills. ISBE is also working with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and other state agency partners on improving the preparation of students for work and careers and is chairing the Illinois Workforce Investment Board Task Force on K-12 career development. ISBE, DCEO and other agency partners are working to expand the innovation talent pool in Illinois through a variety of strategies including: (i) promoting science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education; and (ii) aligning the State's activities with career and technical education and industry-led efforts such as the iBIO biosciences education initiative.
- *The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation:* Through its partnerships in communities across the nation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is committed to raising the high school graduation rate and helping all students - regardless of race or family income - graduate as strong citizens ready for college and work.

Through this partnership, the Foundation will provide coordinated, sustained technical assistance to the Governor's Office, ISBE, and other partners (such as a State P-20 Council, if created) to help the State create an overall framework for policy enactment and implementation and step-by-step action plans for particular issues. The Foundation will provide its technical assistance primarily through Holland & Knight's Education Policy Team. Holland & Knight's Education Policy Team has extensive expertise on the

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process of state policy change, and has assisted numerous states to leverage federal law and national reforms to move state policy. As part of this partnership, Holland & Knight will help ISBE and the Governor's Office make linkages to the Foundation's other core partners and national best practices, and will maintain the connection between the State of Illinois and the Foundation for possible participation in multi-state initiatives.

II. PARTNERSHIP DESCRIPTION

In support of the State's efforts to implement effective policy change, the partnership will focus primarily on objectives and strategies relating to college and work readiness. The Partnership's work will occur in at least two phases, as described below.

A. Phase I Process

Phase I of the partnership's work will consist of a visioning and analysis process leading to recommendations in the policy areas identified in II.B, as well as an analysis of any other related policy areas requested by ISBE or the Governor's Office. The Foundation and Holland & Knight will collaborate with ISBE and the Governor's Office to determine outside experts appropriate for the selected policy areas. Holland & Knight and the outside experts will then, in coordination with the State partners:

1. Map and review what efforts the State has underway in the various policy areas;
2. Benchmark the State's status in each policy area against best-in-class approaches nationally and internationally; and
3. Provide recommendations for actions in each policy area, considering the Illinois context and the State's current policies and programs.

The Phase I analysis will be presented to the Agency, Board, and Governor's Office prior to or at the [_____] 2007 State Board meeting.

In addition to the Phase I analysis described above, Phase I activities will include a review by Holland & Knight, working with the State partners, of the State's current status in other key policy areas identified through national consensus as central to a comprehensive state college- and work-readiness policy agenda (such as assessments, availability of advanced learning opportunities, access to higher education, and effective educators). Holland & Knight will also broadly identify possible policy objectives and strategies relating to these policy areas. This review (in less detail than the analysis in the Phase I policy areas discussed below) will help to determine areas for further analysis and action in subsequent phases of the partnership.

Throughout the Phase I activities, Holland & Knight and the outside experts will closely coordinate with the State Superintendent and the designated Governor's Office representative, as well as other identified staff. Holland & Knight and the outside experts will also collaborate with the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), and other key constituencies as identified by the State partners (including, without limitation, the Coalition for Illinois High Schools) throughout the Phase I process.

B. Phase I Policy Areas

The Phase I analysis described in II.A shall address the following policy areas, as well as other related policy areas that may be requested by ISBE or the Governor's Office:

1. Establishing Expectations:

- Recommend a state process for defining the knowledge and skills needed for success in college and the workforce in the 21st Century, and compare the Illinois Learning Standards to national benchmarks and model definitions from other states.
- Consider State policies relating to graduation requirements and course content to ensure high school graduates are taking challenging courses to prepare them for life after high school.

2. Data Systems and Measurements:

- Describe the importance of a world-class data system for the achievement of educational goals and improving student outcomes.
- Determine opportunities for improved coordination and integration among the current state data systems (e.g., Student Information System, higher education data systems, systems used for workforce preparation programs).
- Provide recommendations for the inclusion of data elements to better inform policy and action including, specifically, the 10 essential elements identified by the Data Quality Campaign as critical to the development of a longitudinal data system.
- Suggest methods by which the State can more effectively use data to drive State policy, support district/school improvement, and student-level support and interventions.

3. Support and Intervention Systems.

- Recommend possible approaches for targeted, data-driven, student-level support and intervention systems, considering practices in other states and building off of the State's existing dropout recovery and prevention and Response To Intervention (RTI) programs.
- Suggest possible frameworks for a broad support system for all high schools and districts in improvement status.
- Consider methods, based on national models and lessons learned, to undertake targeted interventions in low-performing high schools and districts, differentiated based on level of need.

C. Phase II Activities

Upon review of the Phase I report, ISBE and the Governor's Office will identify specific initiatives that are both ripe for State action and critical to the State's implementation of its policy objectives. Holland & Knight will coordinate the development of a step-by-step action plan to address each selected initiative. On some

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issues, Holland & Knight will develop the action plan primarily working with ISBE, with general coordination with the Governor's Office. On other issues, the reverse will be true. The action plan will include recommendations for: (i) other external partners that can assist with the implementation of the initiative; (ii) necessary staffing and/or contractual support needed to carry out the initiative; and (iii) identifying and obtaining the other necessary resources to carry out the initiative.

Based on the "higher level" review of other possible policy objectives, ISBE and the Governor's Office may identify areas for in-depth analysis not addressed in the Phase I report. The Foundation and Holland & Knight will then coordinate with ISBE and the Governor's Office to frame the scope of the analysis and establish a process and schedule for an in-depth review of those policy areas.

D. Participation in regular meetings and follow-up to help manage and succeed in the process of policy change

Holland & Knight and the Foundation will schedule regular meetings with ISBE and the Governor's Office (as separate meetings, or collectively, as deemed appropriate by the partnership) to track overall progress and discuss next steps for specific action items. Between these meetings, Holland & Knight will coordinate directly with members of ISBE and the Governor's Office to assist with the management and implementation of policy change. Holland & Knight will provide semiannual detailed reports to the Governor, State Board, and State Superintendent on the status of the partnership's initiatives and anticipated activities during the next six months, providing an opportunity for the State's leadership to evaluate outcomes and future policy directions. More frequent reports on specific issues will be provided upon request.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

The services provided by Holland & Knight within the scope of this partnership will be at no cost to the State. Holland & Knight's services will be provided through the support of the Foundation, based upon the Foundation's budget for this partnership. The Governor's Office and ISBE agree that the state-specific policy planning arising out of the partnership can be shared with Foundation staff, other states, and other core partners assisting the Foundation on its national college and work readiness initiatives. If the Governor's Office or ISBE require or desire deeper policy support or legal counseling on specific matters beyond the scope of services provided through the support of the Foundation, Holland & Knight and/or the Foundation will work with ISBE and the Governor's Office to address the need for those services on a case-by-case basis.

The partnership formed under this Memorandum of Understanding will extend until June 30, 2008, with an option for renewal by all parties dependent on a review of the services performed, State needs, and policy outcomes. The parties to this Memorandum of Understanding may amend it at any time through a written agreement signed by each of the parties, and any party may terminate this Memorandum of Understanding at any time through written notice to the other parties.

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In demonstration of their agreement to the terms set forth in this Memorandum of Understanding, authorized representatives of the Governor's Office, ISBE, and the Foundation have set forth their signature below.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH

By: _____

Its: _____

Date: _____

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

By: _____

Its: _____

Date: _____

THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

By: _____

Its: _____

Date: _____

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