

PEORIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS staff news weekly

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New FOIA Law Impacts Everyone, Training Planned

New rules are coming and old ones are being tightened relating to information requested by the public from public bodies. Updates by Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan to the Illinois Freedom of Information Act take effect officially on January 1, 2010. The changes will blanket the entire district and everyone should know the impact it will have on them individually, as a school and for the District.

To help educate employees on the changes, the District's FOIA Officer, Stacey Shangraw, plans to hold an information session for all clerical staff on December 17th, the early release day prior to the holiday break. The training will take place from 2:45 - 3:15 p.m. in

the DLC Board Room at the Administration Building. Shangraw says she plans to have clerical staff be the point person at each school and department to help share and grant information requests, as well as answer questions. Each school's principal will assign at least one clerical representative to attend the training. All clerical staff not working in schools should plan to attend. A summary of changes can be found below. Additional details will be shared at the upcoming information and training session. Beginning January 1, 2010, if you receive a request for information or have questions about the process, call Stacey Shangraw at 309-672-6745 or email stacey.shangraw@psd150.org.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ New Illinois FOIA Summary ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

- The Illinois Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is designed to ensure the public has access to information about their government and its decision-making process.
- Changes will take effect January 1, 2010.
- All public bodies must have a designated FOIA officer. If a request comes to someone else in the organization, it **MUST** be forwarded internally to the FOIA officer. Requests no longer need to state it is a FOIA request. **ALL REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION ARE CONSIDERED A FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST.** It is the responsibility of the employees of the organization to forward requests to the FOIA officer to ensure compliance.
- Attorney General (AG) will assign four Public Access Counselors statewide. They will work with both the public and the public bodies to ensure people obtain information.
- Anyone may request a document. It no longer needs to be filed on a FOIA form. It may be requested in any format. If there is a verbal request, it is in the best interest of the public body to ask the requestor to put the request in writing. If you ask for the request in writing and the person refuses, you are not required to fill the request. You must document the conversation and forward the summary to the FOIA officer. You may not ask the requestor why they want the information.
- Public documents include all information relating to the business of the organization – electronic or paper. Metadata is considered part of the document – for example, the creation date, time or computer which may be encrypted in the document. Personnel files are no longer exempt.
- However, private information about an employee is exempt.
- Any request that is denied must be sent to the PAC for review, and a letter must be sent to the requestor outlining the specific exemption.
- One major change includes a shortened time frame to respond to requests – now only five business days. Business days are defined as Monday through Friday / holidays follow State and Federal calendars only. The amount of time for an extension is also limited to five days.

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Redefining Teaching & Learning

Author and Literacy Expert Says "Let Your Students Exhale!"

Breathe in, but don't breathe out. Breathe in a little more. One more time! You can hold it, can't you?

We know that for every breath we inhale, we also must exhale. It's a balance and it's the way breathing works to keep us energized, moving and most importantly alive. The same balance is needed in teaching reading and writing, Pam Allyn said to a group of about 30 reading coaches and teachers on Tuesday afternoon. Allyn, the Founding Director of Books for Boys and the Executive Director of LitLife, a nationally recognized organization specializing in transformative school improvement through literacy education, says teachers and schools across the country are providing lesson after lesson on reading for students. However, most writing lessons come as an afterthought, while preparing for standardized tests. In essence, she says students are "breathing in" a lot of information through reading, but not getting an adequate chance to "breath out" what they have learned through writing. Allyn says without a balance of reading and writing in the classroom, teachers are suffocating the creative energy of their students, and also missing an opportunity of evaluating students' reading, comprehension and organization skills.

"They have got to be practicing, they have got to be writing," says Allyn. "They cannot just be reading and taking in, because they don't know what they are taking in."

Another opportunity Allyn hopes teachers will afford their students is more instruction in non-fiction texts.

"When you think about what kids are going to be expected to do in the world, a lot of it is going to be about managing an environment of information and yet in classrooms, especially in language arts, a lot of our focus

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-FOIA Summary, continued from front page

- New law caps amount we may charge for copies – The first 50 pages are free. Additional pages can cost no more than 15 cents per page. The public body may charge actual copying costs for color and abnormal size copies.
- Fines for non-compliance – If the public body does not respond within five business days, it cannot charge for copying costs or treat the request as unduly burdensome. A civil penalty of between \$2,500 - \$5,000 may be imposed on the public body.

Acceptable reasons for exemptions and extensions, as well as further details of the changes and a time for questions and answers will be covered at the training session. Please plan to attend this important training meeting on Thursday, December 17 at 2:45 p.m. in the DLC Board Room!

-Exhale, continued from front page

on fiction and reading fictional text,” says Allyn. “That’s good, but I would like to see more balance across the country in terms of what we are giving our students opportunities to read.”

Allyn says non-fiction is typically at the bottom of the scale when it comes to classroom libraries and lessons. She would like to see non-fiction’s role in the classroom reversed.

I am advocating that your classroom libraries must be full of these books, because that is what students really need to navigate in the world,” she says. “Not having non-fiction is no longer an option, it is essential. In fact, there is almost an urgency now with students on the internet. Students are logging on and they really don’t know what’s real and what’s not real. We need to give them a lot of practice in reading text and knowing why we can trust this author.”

With more emphasis on writing and non-fiction texts, Allyn believes teachers will also see better standardized test scores. She says

non-fiction texts help students become better writers and organizers, because it gives them facts to write about, a necessity for standardized tests. She adds technology is a great way to incorporate both into the classroom and even to publish students’ work.

“Whether you are reading on a Kindle or you are reading pages of the book or even online, you still have to read and you still have to know more than ever before how to express yourself in writing,” she says. “(With the advancement of technology) offices will be virtual and you will have to be a better writer than ever before. The fact that we are not teaching writing as a subject area is not good.”

For Pam Allyn’s presentation, visit pamallyn.com. Along with her duties at LitLife, Allyn is also an author for Scholastic and travels the country as a motivational speaker to school staffs and parents. Allyn’s visit to Peoria was sponsored by Scholastic.

Phares Award Nomination Forms Ready

Nominations are being sought for the prestigious Phares Award, given annually within Peoria Public Schools to one outstanding educator. Nomination forms will soon be available in each school office.

Completed nominations are due to Donna Bordner at the Administration Building no later than 4:00 p.m. on February 12th.

Safety: Become Active, Be Prepared to Safely Lift

People who lead an inactive lifestyle are more prone to back injury. Walking, stretching and light weight lifting exercises will help to strengthen the back and abdominal muscles, which will better prepare the back for the lifting that must be done. There are many exercises that you can do on your own to increase

activity. Some ideas can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website at http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/phy_act.htm

Consult your physician before beginning an active exercise program.



CSSS: Bus Behavior Success

Hines Primary School teachers, students and parents have reason to celebrate! Office discipline referrals resulting from problems on school buses have been reduced by 71%! For the same period of time in the 2008-2009 school year there were 41 bus referrals compared to only 12 this year! This resulted in increased classroom time for students, instructional time for teachers, as well as reduced disciplinary time spent by the administrators at Hines.

The Hines staff attributes the success in reducing bus referrals to their new dismissal procedure. A committee of teachers devised this well-designed plan that allows dismissal to be completed in 5 minutes. Each teacher in a grade level takes charge of a group-walkers, car riders, bus/van riders. All students who are bus or car riders are escorted to the gym at

3:25 by an assigned teacher where they sit in bus number and daycare van lines. Two teachers monitor each line until the vehicles arrive. There are two teachers with walkie talkies; one stationed at the bus loading area and one inside the gym. They communicate as buses and vans arrive, and the teachers in the gym are informed so that the students can be taken out and directly loaded onto the correct buses. The students are kept calm, the buses are loaded quietly, and off they go!

Additionally, Hines staff have worked hard to encourage communication and to build relationships with the bus drivers that serve their students. One morning this fall after students were dropped off they provided coffee and donuts to the bus drivers while they dialogued about bus behavior issues. Great job problem solving Hines Primary School staff!

Try This! Assistive Technology Ideas

For vocabulary development or research projects, use Google Wonder Wheel. Do a Google search and then click Show Options. Finally, click Wonder Wheel. This tool is great for finding related terms.

