Aug. 7, 2012

Kathleen Roberts
[Redacted]

Dear Ms. Roberts:

This letter is in response to your recent request for information under the Freedom of Information Act. Your request was received on Aug. 3, 2012.

You have requested information regarding the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP-400). Our response is as follows:

Request 1: Why are there 50 questions on the math section and only 40 are scored. I realize that ISBE has added 10 pilot questions but if a test taker answers 50 questions they should receive credit for all answered.

Response 1: Please note that FOIA is the mechanism through which entities are able to seek access to public documents. Rather than requesting documents, the majority of your items seek answers to questions. However, in the spirit of cooperation, we are doing our best to respond to your inquiries.

As ISBE’s Linda Jamali indicated to you in an e-mail on July 23, “Nonscorable items are embedded into operational test forms in order to field test the items before they are used to calculate candidates’ scores on future test forms. The inclusion of nonscorable items on student, secondary and post-secondary college admissions, professional licensure and other standardized tests is an industry-standard practice. Virtually all such tests contain nonscorable test items in order to ensure that the items meet the psychometric criteria for inclusion on future test forms. This practice ensures that examinees are scored fairly because test items that display anomalous characteristics will not be used on operational test forms. Each individual test-taker benefits from field testing through the use of embedded nonscorable items for the reasons stated here: field testing helps to make sure that the items the test-taker responds to provide a valid representation of what the test-taker knows and is able to do. The purpose of nonscorable items field tested in this manner is that the quality and fairness of the tests is reinforced for each and every test-taker.”

Request 2: What is the percentage of pass/fail rate for the state since February 1, 2012 when the TAP 400 was in place.
Response 2: The results of the TAP, including pass/fail information, are posted on our website at www.isbe/certification/html/testing.htm.

Request 3: What is the % of applicants that took the test more than once.

Response 3: Information is not available relative to how many times each examinee takes each of the four subtests before he/she is successful. Therefore, we have no documents responsive to this portion of your request.

Request 4: Why did the passing % change from 35% to 75%, this is a huge increase.

Response 4: As ISBE’s Linda Jamali indicated to you in an e-mail on July 23, “The rigor of mathematics questions on the Basic Skills test was increased from roughly an 8th grade level to a more appropriate level expected of college sophomores in September of 2001, when an enhanced basic skills test was administered. The 096 Basic Skills test was a compensatory test. It did not include separate subtests. There were minimum allowable scores, i.e. one could not score less than 35% on the mathematics portion to pass the entire test. 35% wasn’t the cut score; 35% was the minimum allowable score for the mathematics section of the test. When the Basic Skills 300 was implemented in 2010, each subarea was offered as a separate subtest. This was done so that examinees could ‘bank’ subtests that they passed and could focus on retaking the subtest that they failed. Cut scores were increased at this time to ensure that educators had a certain level of competency in the areas of Reading Comprehension, Language Arts, Mathematics, and Writing. PreK-12 educators in Illinois must demonstrate the proficiency to pass the mathematics subtest as well as the three other subtests.”

Request 5: Why did ISBE state there would be changes to the test to make it more valid, no changes have been made or at least not told to the public.

Response 5: As ISBE’s Linda Jamali indicated to you in an e-mail on July 23, “This year, the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) was implemented and cut scores established on June 21, 2012. The test bank for the TAP is the same as it was for the enhanced basic skills test. The cut scores on the TAP, however, are higher than the cut score for the 096 (2001-2010) Basic skills test and more closely resemble the cut scores established for the Basic Skills 300 series (2010-2012). A two-day standard setting (score setting) conference was held in Springfield and included educators from across Illinois. The educators exemplified a wide range of backgrounds, from elementary to university level, mathematics to special education, and the very experienced to more novice. ISBE takes the standard setting process very seriously, and the educators involved in this conference worked diligently to recommend the cut scores that were ultimately approved by both the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board and the State Board of Education.”

Request 6: Why are there more points given to some math questions than others and who makes the decision on which math questions receive more points.

Response 6: Please see Response 5.

Request 7: Who makes the decision on the 10 pilot questions and are they decided on before or after the test is given.
Response 7: Please see Response 5.

If you have questions, please contact Amanda Simhauser at (217) 782-4648 or asimhaus@isbe.net.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Matt Vanover
Director of Public Information