FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:      CONTACTS:
September 26, 2008     Katie Ridgway  312/814.3158
                         Ashley Cross (DCEO) 312/814.8193
                         Matt Vanover (ISBE) 217/782.4648

Governor Blagojevich Announces Illinois Innovation Talent Program

New program partners state, business and high schools to promote innovation-centered education

CHICAGO – Recognizing the need for students to become globally competitive, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich announced a public-private partnership to work with 23 Illinois high schools on a pilot project designed to promote innovation-centered education and to increase student achievement in math, science and engineering. Illinois Innovation Talent creates a unique learning environment where students work as teams alongside industry, government and community experts to solve real-world problems.

“We must prepare students today to ensure a strong workforce for tomorrow. Innovation Talent will challenge students to think innovatively and become problem-solvers at a young age, helping Illinois remain competitive in an increasingly global economy,” said Governor Blagojevich.

Illinois Innovation Talent seeks to build lasting relationships between schools and outside partners to generate a pipeline of future workers that are prepared to tackle the real life challenges facing today's communities and businesses. The program will promote career awareness and better prepare students with the skills they need to remain competitive in today's innovation and technology-based economy.

Illinois high schools and private partners will work together to design and implement curriculum that develops the critical skills needed before students enter the workforce. Twenty-three Illinois high schools and 29 professional organizations from across the state are participating in this unique pilot program. A full list of participants can be found in the attached fact sheet.

Innovation Talent’s advisory board includes the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, iBIO, American Electronics Association (AeA), Motorola Foundation, DePaul University, University

“The Illinois Biotechnology Industry Association believes that training the next generation is critical to ensuring the long-term success of our industry. We are excited to be a part of the Innovation Talent program and to have the opportunity to work with a group of students who will become the future leaders of Illinois,” said David Miller, iBIO President.

“This program is vital to developing the innovation talent that will be the foundation of our future workforce,” said Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce President Jerry Roper. “It is an innovative response to a critical problem facing Illinois businesses. It provides students with the opportunity to work in multidisciplinary teams on real world problems under the watchful eye of a real client. This experience gives students an authentic glimpse into how business is conducted and what skills are necessary to succeed.”

IMSA, a nationally recognized leader of problem-based learning, is providing ongoing professional development support services and workshops to educators directly involved in implementing and assessing problem-based learning. National scientific research indicates that problem-based learning is a highly effective teaching methodology for promoting student engagement in the learning process. Through problem-based learning students are better able to connect their work in the classroom to real world issues and problems. Problem-based learning moves students from merely developing basic skills to fostering transferable critical thinking skills, creativity and innovation. Students who engage in problem-based learning are more likely to have increased critical thinking, enhanced collaborative skills, increased content knowledge and increased achievement in all core subject areas.

The Innovation Talent Program was developed as part of a National Governor’s Association policy academy. The Innovation Talent advisory board developed the concept, reviewed all applications and selected schools based on the applicant school’s perceived ability to successfully implement the program.

“Innovation Talent is about promoting the next generation of talent in Illinois. This unique program partners students with industry leaders to tackle real-world problems. Students will graduate from this program with the skills they need to compete in today’s global economy,” Director of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Jack Lavin said.

“The Illinois State Board of Education is dedicated to preparing students to successfully transition from the classroom to the workforce,” Illinois State Board of Education Superintendent Dr. Christopher Koch said. “By partnering with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and many of the state's leading organizations and corporations, we have developed a program that provides students opportunities to use innovation to solve real world problems, effectively preparing them for the rest of their lives.”
Illinois Innovation Talent builds on the success of Illinois’ other state programs. The program will demonstrate how the updated National Education Technology Standards (NETS) can be implemented in an innovation-centered curriculum. Based on NETS, Innovation Talent will also incorporate the mission and objectives of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

Schools and their partners have begun developing problem-based learning curriculums which will be implemented in classrooms in the spring of 2009. The Innovation Talent Advisory Board will provide recommendations to expand the scale of the program during the summer of 2009.

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