



## Message From the Executive Director

# Superintendents Are Built to Handle the Tough Challenges Ahead

**Dr. Brent Clark**

If you haven't seen it, take a minute and watch this famous [video clip](#) of Muhammad Ali dodging 21 punches in 10 seconds in the corner of a boxing ring during a match in 1977. It's an incredible showcase of speed and agility by "The Greatest" that demonstrated his dazzling ability to float like a butterfly.

As superintendents, we too are accustomed to being backed into corners and dodging punches, albeit not literal ones.

For more than a decade, the state of Illinois woefully underfunded schools. The teacher shortage has made it nearly impossible, in some cases, to find certified staff. Unfunded mandates arrive every year. In-person learning ceased in March and within days schools transitioned to remote learning. Of course, every day, superintendents navigate sometimes rocky relationships with boards, unions and community members.

What happens in these difficult times? We always find solutions. A way to dodge punches, escape the corner, be nimble and return to sound footing. That's what it takes to be a strong leader, and why your board chose you for the job. Time and again, superintendents have demonstrated an ability to rise to the occasion and do whatever it takes to propel their districts forward. #ILSchoolsStepUp

Standing in front of us today is, in my opinion, the most difficult challenge any school leader has ever faced entering a new school year. I would love to say schools are going to deliver a knockout punch and escape unscathed, but that is unlikely. In reality, we will be measured by how well we prepare, communicate, respond to crisis and balance the health and safety of everyone in buildings while also delivering a quality education and supporting social-emotional needs of all students.

It's an unenviable task that will require significant effort and collaboration. And for the 430-plus school districts in Illinois' 40 border counties, the pressure will be magnified as the districts across state lines don't implement the same measures you do.

I'm here to remind you that you were built for this. Nobody else has the training, knowledge, expertise and unrelenting passion to help students reach their potential like you do.

I can't emphasize this next point enough. To stay on your feet and succeed, you are going to need someone in your corner. At IASA, we're here to help, no matter what the problem is.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to review the planning framework, [Learning Over Logistics](#), that was a collaborative effort by IASA, IPA and IASBO. This document is a good tool to make sure your district's transition teams are asking the right questions and having the right conversations around planning.

In addition, IASA recorded an interactive webinar on July 1 with five superintendents discussing their district's re-entry plans as a way to foster collaboration. Furthermore, our Field Services Directors are available to assist 24/7, the Illinois Schools Step Up Toolkit on our website has numerous resources and the IASA COVID-19 Transition Team will continue to release reports, share template letters and offer its support. The group has amazing leaders with big hearts who truly want everyone to succeed and provide the best opportunities for all students.

Most importantly, reach out to peers in your region or those with similar demographics as your district and learn about their plans. Given the challenges that lie ahead, borrowing good ideas is encouraged.

Speaking of big hearts, we recently said goodbye to a true legend in public education, Dr. Rich Voltz. For the past 13 years, Dr. Voltz worked tirelessly to expand IASA's professional development and support school leaders. He was a mentor to many and a personal friend to me. He will be missed. I am also excited to welcome Dr. Courtney Orzel to the team and watch her flourish in that role.

To close, the start of FY 2021 brings changes to the IASA Board of Directors. On pages 5–7, see what the new makeup of the board is. I want to thank Paula Hawley for her leadership this past year, and say I look forward to working even closer with IASA's new president, Dr. Victor Zimmerman. IASA has always been blessed with passionate and visionary leaders, and I am confident that will continue.

Best of luck to each of you. This will be an incredibly difficult and taxing year but, just remember, you're built for this. There are no corners you can't escape.

*Brent Clark*

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