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SUPREME COURT REQUIRES CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR ALL ILLINOIS JUDGES

The Illinois Supreme Court announced Monday it has adopted minimum continuing legal education requirements for all members of the Illinois judiciary. Requiring all judges in the state to take educational courses comes six months after the Supreme Court's requirement that all attorneys in the state take continuing legal education courses.

The Supreme Court announced the new requirements in a letter sent to the approximately 915 judges in the state.

All associate, circuit and appellate judges will be required to take 30 hours of continuing judicial education over a two-year period—the same as the requirement for lawyers which was announced last September. Among the requirement is a minimum of four hours of content addressing judicial conduct, ethics and professionalism issues.

“Under the new rules, judges are required to study both substantive legal matters as well as matters relating to professional civility and courtroom management,” said Chief Justice Robert R. Thomas. “At a minimum, judges should always be up to speed on the latest developments in the law. At the same time, judges are in a unique position to foster a culture of professionalism and civility.

“By focusing upon both of these areas, the new rules reflect the Illinois Supreme Court's unflagging commitment to legal and judicial excellence.”

When the Supreme Court announced new rules requiring continuing legal education for attorneys on September 29, it also established a permanent Supreme Court Commission on Professionalism and required attorneys to take a minimum of four hours in the area of professionalism including sessions on issues involving diversity, addiction, civility and legal ethics.

Judges will fulfill the new requirement through the presentation of an expanded 30-hour Education Conference beginning in 2008. Currently, the Education Conference is presented to

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judges every two years in a 2 1/2-day session. It is anticipated that the Conference will expand to a full week in 2008, and every subsequent two years.

The Education Conference will continue to be presented through the Illinois Judicial Conference under the auspices of its Committee on Education. To that end, the Court has charged the Committee to develop an expanded conference which meets the ongoing judicial education needs of all judges at both the trial and appellate court levels.

“We received the mandate from Chief Justice Thomas and the Court and the Education Committee is happy and enthusiastic, and is already working on putting together the 30-hour mandatory conference for 2008,” said Circuit Judge Hollis L. Webster, chairperson of the Education Committee. “We think it’s a good move in mandating that judges take the same number of hours of continuing education that lawyers are mandated to take.”

Under the Court’s judicial education plan, all judges were "strongly encouraged" to take 15 hours of continuing legal education annually. To that end, the Committee on Education developed a series of regional day-long and multi-day sessions, and judges generally were free to choose those they wished to attend.

Some of those sessions now will be integrated into the biennial Education Conference.

“It probably won’t be efficient to offer the same amount of regional seminars as we have in the past,” said Judge Webster. “The Committee is working on a developing a template so that we’re sure that we cover what the Supreme Court wants us to cover in the 30-hour conference.

“We know that we will offer the bread-and-butter courses in civil, criminal, family, evidence law and ethics. We’ve got subcommittees already working on it, and we are optimistic that in 2008 it is going to be a good and beneficial conference.”

Chief Justice Thomas said that in adopting minimum judicial education requirements to be implemented through the Committee on Education, “the Court intends not only to ensure that Illinois judges attain minimum continuing judicial education hours, but also to ensure judges’ access to resources developed specifically for the state’s judiciary.”

“I am confident that with the input of Illinois judges, the support of the Administrative Office, the dedication of the Committee on Education and the contributions of judicial faculty members, Education Conference 2008 will serve as an exemplary resource for all Illinois judges to continue to build knowledge, to develop new skills and to enhance the administration of justice in our state,” the Chief Justice said.