



Jim Broadway

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## Illinois School News Service

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### Manar files school funding amendment to SB 231

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[Senate Bill 231](#) is the new Senate Bill 1, the new Senate Bill 16, the new bill that Sen. Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill) is hoping will be the vehicle for school funding reform in Illinois. SB 231 is just a shell bill now, but Manar filed an amendment on Wednesday, a 490-page document, as his starting point for 2016.

There are many moving parts to Manar's proposal, and if it advances through the policy process it will be changed a good bit along the way. That's my way of telling you that I am not going to do a thorough, front-to-back analysis of the bill this week. Use the comment link below. Tell me what you think. (Cite specific pages.)

School funding rallies have been regular events at the Capitol for more than a generation. I covered them when I was the Illinois Capitol Bureau Chief for the (now defunct) St. Louis Globe-Democrat in the early 1980s. I participated in them when I was an education-interest lobbyist in the 80s and 90s. (Been clean since '98.)

Governors of both parties have deplored the fact that a child's "starting line in life," the quality of his education, depends on the zip code where his family lives. There have been studies and blue-ribbon commissions and tax-swap proposals and lawsuits. The goal is elusive, but Manar says: "[The time is now to change school funding.](#)"

Manar conducted a news conference this week. The raw, [unedited video clip is here](#). It is about 50 minutes long and it includes some pretty eloquent commentaries from some bright students from Taylorville, Aurora, Peoria and Chicago. The story has been told before, but it gets more dramatic every year.

We'll be looking at aspects of this often in the coming weeks, so I won't take much of your time today. The basic method of mitigating the disparity in resources per child from district to district remains the same; dollars distributed in the same amounts per student will be shifted into a revised General State Aid formula.

The GSA formula has always had an "equalizing" effect, but it has lost its potency in that regard as the state's share of school funding has fallen from nearly 50% of the total in the mid-1970s to around 30% now. Manar's bill takes much of the "mandated categorical" grant money and funnels it through the GSA formula.

Revisions to the formula tilt the distribution of dollars even more dramatically in favor of school districts with small local property tax bases and high property tax rates. Districts with high percentages of students from families living in poverty would also benefit more under the Manar plan than low-poverty rate districts.

There is an assumption of increased funding at the outset of the SB 231 experience. That is to provide some pension relief for the Chicago Public Schools (CPS pays the employer's share of pension payments, while the state still pays the employers' share of pension obligations for the rest of the state's districts.)

The funding increase, a few hundreds of millions of dollars, would also "hold harmless" those districts in affluent areas which receive only a small percentage of their total revenue from the state but would, under SB 231, lose most or all of that without a provision that keeps them from seeing reduced state funding.

Manar stresses the point that "no school district would lose state funding in the first year of its implementation, which is consistent with the governor's request. After that, hold harmless provisions would continue for 4 years to allow districts to budget and plan for the future." But eventually, harmlessness is no longer held.

What are the odds? They are very long. Without massive new funding - the kind of funding that only a significant income tax increase would provide - the resource disparities (\$30,000 per student at the high end; \$6,000 at the low end) will be only marginally mitigated. A yawning gap will remain.

So SB 231 has the potential to improve the status quo a great deal. And there is something to be said for improvement. But there is only one approach that has ever been proposed that would bring the low-revenue schools up to an adequate level of funding - and keep them there for a while. That approach is the tax-swap.

Illinois' property tax rates are nearly the nation's highest, so high that they stand as a barrier to economic development. Manufacturers and other businesses that rely heavily on property that gets taxed either have to make deals with the policymakers or avoid Illinois entirely. Most property taxes go to public schools.

Commissions and consultants in the past have concluded that Illinois' problems of high property taxes and inequitable school funding can be rationally addressed only by the politically painful action of raising state revenue (income tax rates,





sales tax base) and using the revenue to reduce schools' share of property taxes.

Analyze it. The tax-swap would divert more revenue from the affluent areas of Illinois to the high-poverty areas than any other policy could possibly achieve. Sure, even citizens of the affluent areas deplore high property taxes. But as a senator from Zion put it so eloquently years ago: "At least property tax dollars stay home."

See, that kind of leads into another factor that makes all this so politically sticky. Folks not only care about paying more (they don't like it), they also care about who benefits from their loss. Andy Manar has begun an important conversation here in Illinois, but it is one that can turn ugly pretty quick.

#### House PK-12 Committee on School Curriculum & Policy

On Tuesday: [HB 119](#), a carry-over from last year, proposes a committee on student retention to make the "final decision" on whether a student is qualified to be promoted to a higher grade. After being *amended to apply to Chicago only* the bill was [approved 15-6 with 2 voting present](#) and 4 not voting.

[HB 3239](#), another Chicago-only bill, proposes that student members be *elected* to Local School Councils (they are now appointed). The bill was [approved 19-2](#).

[HB 4330](#) establishes a "State Seal of Biliteracy" and requires state public universities to accept such a seal as "equivalent to two years of foreign language coursework taken during high school." [Approved 19-0](#).

[HB 4343](#) gives the [Attendance Commission](#) more time (but just until March 15, so not enough) to submit its initial report to the legislature; the bill [was approved 20-0](#).

[HB 4380](#) seeks to give students options among standardized tests and to make other possibly anti-PARCC policies. The bill was [approved 20-3](#) after it was amended for clarification.

[HB 4397](#) would extend the time period for school districts' receipt of energy efficiency grants. [It passed 20-0](#).

[HB 4432](#), a bill to let a district count a student as in attendance for funding purposes if the student was in fact absent "for the purpose of sounding 'Taps' at a military honors funeral," [was approved 20-0](#).

[HB 4606](#), revising procedures relating to students who are not district residents and must pay tuition, [passed 22-0](#).

[HB 4983](#), a bill creating a "State Global Scholar Certification Program" to document unusual scholastic achievement by students, [was approved 22-0](#).

[HB 5529](#) extends the time in which a school board (not in Chicago) may make certain inter-fund transfers into the district Operation and Maintenance Fund for building repair work. The [committee approved it 22-0](#).

[HB 5556](#), a bill to give CPS more time to submit an Educational Facility Master Plan, [was approved 21-0](#).

[HB 5710](#) would let a high school equivalency certificate holder receive a diploma in Rockford. [It pass 22-0](#).

[HB 5720](#) requires ISBE to create a Task Force on Computer Science Education, [passed 25-0](#).

Finally we come to a bill that was rejected. [HB 5822](#) would require ISBE and the Department of Public Health to establish a "calorie transparency program" to be implemented in the public schools. [At 12-10, it failed](#) to get the needed 14 votes.

[HB 5901](#), a bill creating a process by which information concerning the administration of student assessments would be made available to the public, was [amended and then approved 15-6](#).

[HB 5911](#), a bill that would add to information on children's dental examinations that districts must report to ISBE, also [narrowly passed 15-5](#).

[HR 824](#) would designate June 11 as "Illinois Brass Band Day." The 19 committee members voting on it [all agreed - yes](#).

#### The same committee met on Thursday:

[HB 4227](#) would add five days of student attendance to the school calendar. The committee mulled this one over at length before voting 20-7 to advance it to the floor. Several legislators said they helped the measure reach the floor but expect certain amendments before they will support it there.

[HB 4234](#), a bill to require districts to notify parents by certified mail when their children are suspended, stalled at 13-13, one vote short of approval.

[HB 4996](#) would require school boards to appoint a staff person as liaison with the Department of Children and Family Services with respect to students who are in custody of that agency. Committee members learned there are 11,000 wards of the state in the public schools. The bill passed 25-3.

[HB 5570](#), a bill to require ISBE to develop a curriculum for "high-skilled manufacturing" in vocational education, was approved by the committee 22-1 and placed on second reading in the House.

[HB 6136](#), which would create an Advisory Council on At-Risk Students, describes the make-up of such a council and goes into the details of specific elements of its report to the General Assembly, was approved 21-6.

[HB 6164](#) is a bill to privatize "non-instructional" services now done by staff who are union members. After considerable discussion, the committee cast a tie vote of 11-11. The bill will not advance.

[HB 6299](#) would preserve the employee rights of an educational support staff person whose position is eliminated but who is rehired to another position within a year. The bill was approved by the committee 19-1 on Thursday.

[HB 6333](#) requires a school to request an "asthma action plan" from the parents of a student who has asthma, and it describes protocols in significant detail. The bill got the biggest committee vote of the day, 27-0.

**Bill to triple charter startup funding advances:** [HB 5918](#), a bill that ostensibly adjusts the time periods and other factors in the authorization of charter schools - but with language tripling state funded startup grants and loans from the current maximum of \$500 per student to a new maximum of \$1,500 per student, was advanced to the House floor [by a 9-3 vote](#) of the House PK-12 committee on Charter School Policy on Tuesday.

Support for charter schools is growing in the legislature. While in the past charters were primarily a partisan issue, with support from Republicans and with Democrats either opposing them or just ignoring them, there are many Democrats in the House who now support the charter movement.

The strong committee vote reflects the pro-charter shift. There may also be a tactical aspect to this development. House Speaker Michael Madigan regularly looks for items to "trade" in the complex negotiations of budgets and other issues. He may see HB 5918 as an item Gov. Bruce Rauner might like to see passed.

Rauner, of course, is perhaps the state's top champion of charter schools. And after saying for weeks that there's no point in meeting with Madigan, Senate President John Cullerton - because they won't pass his "Turnaround Agenda" - Rauner now has apparently [decided it would be good to have a chat](#).

**Where are the archives?** The ISNS [archives are still linked to this page](#). You still need to know the secret password (It is still: buy-out. Don't tell. ) to review all the newsletters distributed so far this year and for all of 2015.

**Your inputs - questions, comments, suggestions** - are valued. For twenty years ISNS has been guided by wisdom "from the field." To contribute in this way, just [click this link to our contact form](#).