



Jim Broadway

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School funding challenge now just beginning

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The euphoria should have ended by now. Yes, it was a major achievement on the part of hundreds of people. Sen. Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill) tops the list of legislators to thank, but it is a long list. Hundreds of education leaders and members of the "Fix the Formula" coalition - it was the stuff of a truly epic movie.

Now it's time to face up to the challenges of this victory, and there are several. One thing, you're going to have to get used to the reality that the victory vehicle was not actually SB 1. That bill, Manar's assembly of many heroes' ideas, did falter. SB 1947? I've seen some compensating by calling it [SB 1_947](#). Okay.

It's a painful sting to see up to \$75 million in state funds diverted from public education and other identifiable social needs to pay instead for something that is totally voluntary, totally unencumbered by the requirement to provide a free public education to any kid who shows up at the door - the private schools.

It may take a bit of swallowing to accept the certain fact that per-student *state* support of the "scholarship" program will be greater, as Crain's columnist [Greg Hinz has calculated](#), than the *state's* average per-student support of public schools. (Greg's numbers seem a bit high, but I think he's conceptually correct.)

Local support of charter schools got a little more expensive with the enactment of SB 1_947. That's because an idea Rep. Daniel Burke (D-Chicago) has been trying to get enacted for a few years (it was in [HB 3780](#) this year), the raising of the required minimum charter funding by right at 30%. (You get that figure from the required increase from 75% of a district's tuition (charged to non-resident students) to a new minimum of 97%.)

In a related development, *here's something to watch*. Now that this "[backdoor](#)" style of voucher programs have begun to proliferate (Illinois' is the 20th one) - despite [lacking evidence that they work](#) - charter schools that are failing so bad that they are threatened with closure have been [converting to private school status](#).

The idea is to qualify for some of that excellent scholarship money, which can easily add up to more than a charter school can siphon from the school district it is attached to anyway. Was this possibility an "unintended consequence" of the GOP-demanded backdoor voucher scheme? Sort of makes you wonder.

We'll know much more about how the private school scholarship tax credit (available mainly to the super-rich) will work when the Department of Revenue completes its task of promulgating rules for it. The rule-making process can take a long time, most of a year even for simple bills - and SB 1_947 it quite complex.

But all of the foregoing is child's play compared to the challenge of *making sure the state keeps its promise* to the public schools - the promise clearly set forth in the evidence-based funding part of the bill (starting at [bottom of Page 388](#)):

"The purpose of this Section is to ensure that, by June 30, 2027 and beyond, this State has a kindergarten through grade 12 public education system with the capacity to ensure the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities in accordance with Section 1 of Article X of the Constitution of the State of Illinois."

So SB 1947 was never designed to succeed immediately. It will take 10 years for the new school funding method to reach the point where even the least affluent school district in the state can adequately educate its students. (The original goal stated in the real SB 1 was better than weasel words from the Constitution.)

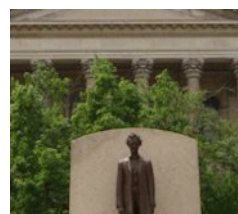
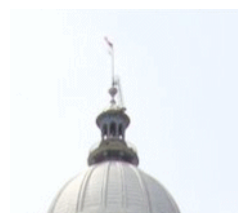
What is the key to meeting this goal? Money, of course. Most, or all, of funding increases to the ISBE budget will be sent through the evidence-based process until the afore-stated goal is reached in 2017. How much new money is needed? I've been told it will take \$650 million-increases, every year, for a decade.

We're off to a pretty bad start with the 2018 increase at only \$350 million. Only budget hearings are [on ISBE's schedule](#). They need to be well attended. Members of "[Fix the Formula](#)" - what a great coalition - need to attend, and to demand that ISBE propose nothing less than \$650 million more for FY 2019.

Keep the coalition intact. It will take determination, public communication and a lot of hard work - all that time, every year. That's one of the disadvantages of living in the Land of the Broken Promise. Just getting a promise made is hard enough, but it is far from achieving your goal. You also have to make it be kept.

More on "out-of-school factors": Last week we discussed "[out-of-school factors](#)" and their dominant effects to frustrate the efforts of policymakers and educators to close the achievement gap, the test score variances among higher scoring Asian and white students compared with lower scoring black and Hispanic students.

As you recall, I mentioned the factor that is most-cited in this regard - that of poverty. It has come to my attention that research has strongly documented the adverse effects that a subset of that factor - food insecurity - on students' ability to demonstrate their learning achievements by meeting test expectations.



A segment of "[Hidden Brain](#)," an NPR feature presented by the expert veteran video journalist Shankar Vedantam, told how South Carolina students' test scores declined as the number of days since the last [distribution of food stamps grew](#). The stamps apparently don't last a whole month. Food insecurity eventually sets in.

The question arose: Was it actually the hunger that drove the students' test scores down, or was it the food anxiety, the tension in the family, the possible disruption of what passes for a family's normal state of peace, that affects a student's performance on tests? Some research suggests [it is the actual hunger](#).

Paul Vallas demonstrated this phenomenon back in the 1990s when he was appointed "CEO" of Chicago Public Schools. At the time, the Republican-controlled legislature (!), as a reform (and political) tactic, gave Chicago Mayor Richard Daley control of the CPS. He chose the school board members and they hired Vallas.

It was widely believed that students' performance, in the district former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett had famously called "the [worst in the nation](#)," would just keep floundering - and that would be a black eye for Daley and for Democrats in general. But under Vallas' leadership, the opposite happened.

In addition to making structural and administrative changes that eliminated a lot of waste and corruption (as a former legislative budget staff leader in Springfield, he was very good at that) Vallas also paid a great deal of attention to the growing policymaker concern for students' performance on tests.

Test scores immediately rose dramatically. How did that happen? Changes in the district's environment surely helped, but Vallas told me that the primary reason for higher scores, in his view, was that he made sure the students were offered a school breakfast on the days the tests were administered.

More on Illinois students' above-average SAT scores: A reader sought clarification on last week's observation that class of 2017 Illinois students' SAT scores were significantly better than the national average of SAT scores. The explanation is, of course, that the Illinois cadre of SAT takers was small, somewhat elite.

Instead of having all of the 100,000 or so members of the state's class of 2017 take the SAT, only about 12,000 took it. But it was for them still an option; ISBE was transitioning into a testing relationship with the College Board's SAT, and it will be future classes, beginning with that of 2018, that take the test *en masse*.

As you can see [on the third page](#) of the College Board's recent report, students who are in future graduating classes took preliminary SAT examinations in numbers close to 100,000, more or less. Their aggregate scores as high school seniors are likely to revert to something closer to the national average.

The class of 2017 students who took SAT did so probably because they thought it would boost the chances for a good post-secondary experience. That makes them a different pool, a cadre of high achievers, more ambitious than the general student body, probably also more adept on average - at least as test-takers.

Where will high school graduates go? Most of those who don't continue in some educational mode will go nowhere, of course, but the question is about college. Will those who enroll at an institution of higher education choose an Illinois university, or will they abandon the state? The odds are getting close to 50-50.

During the two-year-plus budgetless experience here, we heard a great deal about students dropping out of Illinois institutions and migrating to our neighbors; they were losing confidence that Illinois universities would still be operative, or worried that the instructional quality in their major was eroding.

But as *State Journal-Register* Business Editor [Tim Landis reported](#) last week, the state's "net loss" of higher education students - the number of outmigrating Illinois students minus incoming students from other states - hit its peak *before the budget crisis even began*. Illinois has been losing students for many years.

An Illinois [Board of Higher Education analysis](#) that was shared with state university presidents and chancellors at the end of 2016 confirmed what they already knew. Half of Illinois freshmen are studying in another state. That may explain some of the angry edge in the "pass-a-budget" testimony to the legislature last spring.

When they're gone, they often stay gone. The IBHE analysis shows that about one-third of students who graduate from Illinois high schools but attend college elsewhere *also find employment* in another state after earning their degree. Only about 10% of those gaining a degree in Illinois take out-of-state jobs.

Competition for students has become overt. A billboard along I-55 heading toward St. Louis tells Illinois students that the University of Missouri campus in that city offers "in-state tuition" for students residing in a region of Illinois counties. It's a business growth tactic. When a competitor falters, you put your boot on his throat.

Illinois institutions understand competition, however. The Illinois Student Assistance Commission [recognizes top scholars](#) from Illinois high schools annually. The presidents of University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University and Eastern Illinois University [hosted a recruiting event](#) for about 150 of them last month in Mt. Vernon.

Meanwhile, long-term planning for growth is a key. SIU President Randy Dunn, for example, sees SIU Carbondale campus as more of a [research-focused institution](#) than the image it has projected in the past. Some reorganization and re-branding should effectively bring more students from Illinois and nationwide.

Higher education in Illinois has been eroded as a state government priority for the last two decades or so. To return to the elite status it once held among state systems seems to be a goal reflected in university leaders' determination this year. But is it a goal of Gov. Bruce Rauner and the legislative leaders?

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10/3/2017

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