



Jim Broadway

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## Illinois School News Service

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### Schools 'one step closer' to the money? Really?

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The frustration is starting to show on Sen. Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill), sponsor of the historic school funding reform act passed by the legislature last year but not implemented - not even ready to be implemented - by the Illinois State Board of Education. ISBE says 23 more "tweaks" are needed for the dollars to flow.

A major barrier was overcome this week when the House and Senate voted to pass, over Gov. Bruce Rauner's veto, SB 444, a measure containing what ISBE had identified last year as "the fix" they needed to distribute about \$350 million in funds via the "Evidence-Based Model" that was defined in SB 1947.

Wednesday's Senate vote was dramatic. After Senate Minority Leader Bill Brady (R-Bloomington) said he would vote "no" on Manar's motion to override the veto, the motion carried [38-17](#) - a margin of just two votes above the minimum needed for an override. Frankly, Brady's statement seemed somewhat confused.

As Illinois NPR education writer Dusty [Rhodes accurately reported it](#), Brady maintained that, "When we negotiate and pass something as monumental as the education reform proposal, which we did in a bipartisan way, we need to stick with that agreement and let time serve out and see what really happens."

**The problem was that the bill had flaws** ISBE said prevented its implementation. As Manar said, ISBE, not legislators, wrote SB 444. Also, Rauner's amendatory veto was irrelevant to the provisions ISBE wrote into the bill. Finally, to vote for an override motion *would be* to "stick with" a bill shaped by a bipartisan agreement.

Brady had not declared a caucus position on Manar's motion. That would have been more problematic. In fact, he urged his caucus members to "vote your district" - that is, to vote as a senator's constituents would want him or her to. Still, the vote was very close in the Senate, perhaps in deference to Brady.

The House had no such problem. There was little or no debate on that chamber's floor. Everyone seemed to understand that (1) ISBE said the underlying bill is necessary and (2) Rauner's desire to expand the number of private schools that can enroll students with tax-credited scholarships was satisfied in another way.

So, just moments before Rauner showed up in the House to deliver his constitutionally-required State of the State address, the House [voted 90-18](#) to override his veto of SB 444. So that fixed the school funding reform problem, right? The money can now flow to school districts that need it the most? Well, not exactly.

**Dusty Rhodes reported that Manar has now turned** his attention to "a list of 23 changes [ISBE] says are still needed. Ten of those items would affect how funds are distributed. ISBE isn't requesting more money, just clarification."

She cited email from ISBE "communications director Jackie Matthews characterized the 23 items as 'discrepancies between legislative intent and the language codified' in the bill." The items address concerns raised by stakeholders and staff, by participants in ISBE meetings and webinars in recent months, she said.

When will it end? Rhodes reported that Manar seems skeptical.

"I have no belief today that that's going to be their final list of what they refer to as 'tweaks,'" he told Dusty Rhodes. "I want to know when they're going to be done." When she asked if he was suggesting "some sort of malfeasance," she wrote his reply: "Not quite, but close."

**What did Rauner say about PK-12 education** in his [State of the State message](#)? Here's the full passage, unedited:

*"The key to job creation is education and training... and we have started to transform education in our state. During our time in the executive branch, funding for K-12 schools has increased \$1.2 billion, and that includes record levels of funding for early childhood education. We enacted historic reforms to end one of the most inequitable school funding formulas in the country. For most districts it will be a welcome and long overdue infusion of new money for their programs. Now, need dictates resources, not zip codes.*

*"We achieved historic parity in per-pupil funding for charter schools, and we created Invest in Kids, the state's first-ever tuition tax credit scholarship program. Now, with more than \$45 million already contributed, good students in low-income*



*families will have a way to attend schools that meet their needs.*

*"Scholarship Granting Organizations have experienced unprecedented demand for the program. One in Chicago received more than 11,000 student applications the first day.*

*We created a task force to find ways to overcome the shortage of agriculture teachers, a critical need in a state with 27 million acres of farmland. These steps are designed to achieve one goal: prepare our children to be prosperous participants in the 21st century workforce. When we create the jobs, Illinois' young people will be ready to fill them."*

**The House and Senate get started** a busy month next week. The [Senate will convene](#) at the Capitol on a dozen days in February, according to the calendar, and the [House will occupy its chamber](#) on eight days. That may not sound like much, but in March - primary election month - each will meet just four times.

Still, there's not much on the near horizon that will capture the attention of educators. On Wednesday, two House committees are scheduled to meet in the morning. (Is the near overlap in time intended to prevent anyone from covering both?) Each has an agenda that is on the slim side.

The House committee on PK-12 [licensure, administration and oversight](#) will meet at 9 a.m. in Room 115 (in case you want to monitor). First on its list is [HB 4167](#), the bill you've already read about that seeks to swell the ranks of substitute teachers by allowing education-preparation students to seek licenses for that.

Also posted are [HB 4235](#), which would prohibit mandate waivers relating to non-resident tuition unless the district asking for the waiver is in a "designated teacher shortage area," and [HB 4280](#), which is a creative proposal to turn students who were former English learners into fully prepared high school language teachers.

**The House PK-12 committee on curriculum and policies** will convene at 10 a.m. Wednesday to hear two bills: [HB 4193](#) is the bill you read about before on special education due process hearings, and [HB 4205](#), also previously reported, is the bill requiring at-risk students to be connected to "behavioral health support."

The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to convene in Room 212 at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday with two bills posted. [SB 650](#) is a carryover from last year. In its current form it would permit district unions to be notified "electronically" of hearings set in relation to mandate waiver requests. Carryover bills are often amended, sometimes into policy not even closely related to the original purpose of a bill. We'll have to watch for amendments to be filed.

Speaking of mandates, [HB 1252](#) is also posted in the Senate committee. The bill would require a semester (not just a unit) of civics education to be included in a school's curriculum for 6th, 7th or (not "and," as the bill had required before it was amended in the House) 8th grade. The House passed it [67-49](#) in November.

House committees may be monitored [at this link](#). Senate committees may be monitored [at this link](#). You need to click the number of the room where the committee is convened, which is why I provide that information. Some hearings have just and audio-only "webcast," while other give you an option for video.

**Sen. Daniel Biss has surged into second place** in the contest for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, according to a [We Ask America poll](#) conducted by phone during the last few days of January. [Crain's Chicago Business](#) now considers this race "wide open," no longer a sure thing for Chicago billionaire J.B. Pritzker.

The statewide poll results were: Pritzker 29.8%, Biss 17.4% and Chris Kennedy 11.5%, with Tio Hardiman, Bob Daiber and Robert Marshall each under 2%. This result, Crain's reported Thursday, comes after Pritzker has spent \$10 million in media ads, mostly in an effort to [counter ads attacking him](#) funded by Gov. Bruce Rauner.

A previous poll by We Ask America, Crain's reported, showed Pritzker with 39.4%, Kennedy with 15.4% and Biss with 6.3%. So Pritzker's and Kennedy's support has fallen while support for Biss has soared. Of course, early polling is mainly an exercise in name-recognition, but significant movement is probably meaningful.

Pritzker apparently noticed the more recent result. He has [aired an ad attacking Biss](#) for having [co-sponsored SB 1](#), the flagrantly unconstitutional pension "reform" law that was subsequently overturned by the Illinois Supreme Court. (In the Senate, the point of passing that bill was to prove its approach was unconstitutional. But Biss has acknowledged that his involvement was driven by an "obsessive hysteria" about pension costs that made him and others act "irresponsibly.")

**Can any Democrat derail Pritzker's candidacy?** [The question keeps being asked](#). And it is an important one, because the Pritzker-Blagojevich relationship may well be the billionaire's Achilles Heel in the November general election. In my view, it is. It's a genuine argument and even Rauner can make it stick to JB.

It seems obvious that only Biss or Kennedy could overtake Pritzker. But both of Illinois U.S. Senators endorsed him, and so has popular Secretary of State Jesse White, and the AFL-CIO. It does appear the die has been cast. To beat Pritzker, Biss or Kennedy must offset the "delivery" power of Chicago precinct leaders. Not likely.

So another question arises: Can Pritzker defeat Rauner in November? If Rauner had acted like a competent administrator, like Jim Edgar or Jim Thompson, he could beat JB like a drum. But Bruce is a conspicuous failure and a man who seems

willing to spin a false yard even when the truth is obvious to all. Pritzker prevails.

One more question: What if Rep. Jeanne Ives defeats Rauner in the GOP primary? Then all bets are off. That would put Illinois up for sale to the Koch Brothers. Ives has a forceful personality and she's on a mission. With just average financial support, I believe she'd give JB, or any of the Democrats, a very tough fight.

**Visited the medical center this week.** Won't tell you what for. Too disgusting. My discharge instructions directed me not to drive a car, operate heavy equipment, make any important decisions or sign any legal documents for at least a day. I'm pretty sure that I didn't to any of those things. (At least I *think* I didn't.)

I tell you this for two reasons. First, I wanted to give you a heads up about what you can look forward to enjoying in two, three, four decades. Second, I wanted to tell you why I didn't deliver a newsletter since Monday. (Or ... *did* I ...?)

**Links to all newsletters posted last year** - and it was a very exciting year - can be found in the [web page at this link](#).

**The best way to contact me:** Use the link below. As soon as you "submit" your message, it is sent to me by email. Your message may be complex and "attached" to a document, or it may be as simple as "call me." I am always connected to my email, and I promise to respond to you as soon as possible.

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