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Bill to abolish charter commission advances

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The ISNS bill-tracking web page is up to date as of this morning. If you click the ["Big Ideas" link](#), you'll notice that [HB 2100](#), a bill to simply abolish the Illinois State Charter School Commission and transfer its resources and responsibilities to the Illinois State Board of Education, has already reached the floor of the House.

The bill was voted out of committee after a brief hearing in which [Rep. Emanuel Chris Welch](#) (D-Westchester), the bill's sponsor, agreed that an amendment would be needed because of a few unnoticed flaws in the text. He promised to return to the committee, probably this week, with an amendment to consider.

Was that a commitment to present an "agreed amendment"? Would it come from negotiations with opponents of the bill and preserve the SCSC and its authority to force school boards to accept charters in their districts, like it or not?

"I didn't say it would be an agreed amendment," Welch told the committee.

[In a party-line vote](#), the committee's five Democrats voted to restore local control as the sole factor on whether a district will host a charter school, while all three Republicans voted to preserve control by commission for whose members not a single resident of any district in Illinois voted - and very few even know.

Testimony in opposition to the bill came from Ashley Munson, a lobbyist for the [Illinois Network of Charter Schools](#). She gave the INCS talking point about how important it is for charter applicants to have a way of "appealing" adverse decisions by local school boards, as if the courts are an insufficient venue for such appeals.

Witnesses in favor of abolishing the commission with HB 2100 included Terry Hall, a member of the [Woodlawn SD 50](#) board of education. She was eloquent in expressing her frustration at the SCSC's bias and incompetence in imposing the Prairie Crossing Charter School on her district - [for another five years](#).

"We are the home of the first state-imposed charter school - Prairie Crossing - formed in 1999," Hall said. "We've been through four renewals already - two with ISBE and two with the State Charter School Commission," one as recent as last month. The SCSC gave the school "no guidance" to correct defects, she said.

The performance review of Prairie Crossing was "based only on self-reporting by the charter school, and excluded any evidence of the impact on Woodland, the host district, and excluded any input from the surrounding community." The SCSC lacks "the objectivity ... the expertise and the resources" to be effective, she said.

One more thing on charters. The "movement" is slowing down nationally, probably as states find charters are no better (or worse) than regular schools - but they're harder to regulate. Although I'm sure it's not happening in Illinois, some state have found charter operators to be [less than completely scam-free](#).

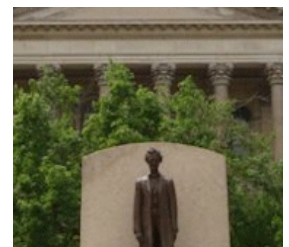
The House PK-12 appropriations committee will get the week started for us with a [hearing a 2 p.m. today](#) for a subject-matter discussion of FY 2020 funding for "Early Childhood, Community and Residential Services Authority, District Intervention, Special Education." Discussion of posted bills may also occur.

As you know, budget bills (those with a \$ in their short titles) rarely pass before the last week of the session, so those bills in this committee's custody are probably just there to be talked about. But budgeting this year will be stressful because, in addition to Gov. JB Pritzker's \$39-billion proposal for FY 2020 state General Fund expenditures, a supplemental budget of more than \$3 billion for the current fiscal year also seems likely.

Pritzker is said to be pushing for fast action on his proposed constitutional amendment for a graduated income tax. It can't happen quickly, but the only way for it to happen at all will be for the resolution putting it on the ballot to pass this spring and for a 18-month period of public education to commence ASAP.

The [Party of No](#) is already bracing itself for a fight, determined as ever to protect their wealthy patrons. All Republicans in the House have been required to [co-sponsor a resolution](#) asserting untrue evils of a graduated tax. We'll examine this tax issue more as time goes by. It's an interesting proposal to come from a billionaire.

As usual, the other two House education committees are scheduled to convene Wednesday. The one dealing with ["curriculum and policies"](#) is to convene at 9:30 a.m., and the one on ["administration, licensing and charter schools"](#) will follow at 2:30 p.m. They both have a ton of bills posted for hearings.



The "policies" panel apparently may hear [HB 341](#), which asserts that "a school board may allow the motto 'In God We Trust' to be displayed in a conspicuous location inside or outside each school building." Did the Illinois School Lawyers Association put them up to this - or are they just playing to their base?

The "charters" panel has nothing that is pending. No amendment has been filed on HB 2100 that would save the charter commission from being abolished. Perhaps one will be filed today, but the committee has several bills that, to the SCSC, would probably be almost like being abolished.

After this week there will be just three more Wednesdays before March 29, when the House committees' deadline for clearing their dockets comes crashing down. Folks need to start talking real fast like this or most of the pending bills will be re-referred to the Rules Committee, a graveyard for returning legislation.

After taking a vacation last week, the Senate returns to the Capitol today. The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to convene at 1 p.m. Actually, they should just call it the [Sen. Kimberly Lightford Committee](#). The Democrat from Westchester is the sponsor of seven of the panel's 10 posted bills.

As folks who have followed this committee for very long know, [Sen. Lightford](#) has been the sponsor of most major School Code bills enacted in recent years. She no longer chairs the committee because she's a Senate leader, second only to President John Cullerton, but her role in school policy is still strong.

The other school policy superstar, of course, is [Sen. Andy Manar](#) (D-Bunker Hill), whose efforts leading to enactment of "Evidence-Based Funding" in 2017 caused a lot of talk about him being a candidate for governor. Wisely, he passed on that and remains focused on policy initiatives - including two bills posted today.

Pritzker has revamped ISBE leadership by appointments of a new State Superintendent of Education, a new State Board chairman, seven other new board members and one reappointed member, creating a board with more public education system involvement and achievement than any other board in recent memory.

Yes, I agree with the reaction of Advance Illinois President [Robin Steans](#):

"We are thrilled ... that [Dr. Carmen Ayala](#) has been appointed as Illinois' State Superintendent of Education," Steans said in a statement to the media. "She has been a trailblazer on behalf of kids throughout her career, most recently ensuring equity for all students through her leadership in passing an equitable school funding formula."

As to the new additions to the State Board, Steans was also enthusiastic: "[T]hese new members have spent decades upon decades championing a high quality education for Illinois' students," she said. "We look forward to working with Dr. Ayala and the board during this period of transition and for the next four years."

With Supt. Ayala, the other key official at the top of Illinois educational structure is the new chairman of the State Board. That would be [Darren Reisberg](#), Vice President for Strategic Initiatives at University of Chicago. Ayala replaces [Tony Smith](#) and Reisberg replaces the [Rev. James Meeks](#), both appointees of Gov. Bruce Rauner.

Of the State Board members appointed by Rauner, only Susie Morrison - whose distinguished 40-year education career included staff leadership positions she held at ISBE - is carried over from the Rauner Administration. Reisberg named her to chair its Education Policy Planning Committee. Other appointees are:

- Sauk Village CCSD 168 Superintendent Donna Simpson Leak was elected vice chair of the board. An active participant in national education organizations, she holds a PhD in administration and supervision from Loyola University and a masters in educational administration from Governor's State University.
- Cristina Pacione-Zayas (elected secretary of the board), is director of policy at Erikson Institute and, previously, was leader of the Latino Policy Forum's Education Department. She has been influential in achieving excellent education outcomes and was a member of Pritzker's transition team.
- David Lett, an adjunct professor on the Education Leadership Department at the University of Illinois Springfield, was superintendent for Pana Community Unit School District 8 from 2001 to 2017, his last position after 35 years as a teacher and administrator. He was also a key advocate for equitable school funding.
- Jane Quinlan, Regional Superintendent of ROE 9 (Champaign-Ford Counties), was selected by Reisberg chair the board's Finance and Audit Committee. She holds a doctorate in educational organization and leadership from UIUC.
- Christine Benson has 35 years of teaching and administrative leadership experience in Mendota, Ottawa and Streator. She holds a doctorate of education from Northern Illinois University and a masters in education administration from Illinois State University.
- Cynthia Latimer retired in 2014 after more than 33 years of administrative and classroom experience in Aurora school districts. She holds a masters degree in educational leadership and policy study from Northern Illinois University.
- Jacqueline Robbins was a UniServ Director for the Illinois Education Association from 2007 to 2017. She previously taught high school, was community relations manager and instructor of twenty-eight programs at Hult Health Education Center and as program coordinator and instructor at Illinois Central College.

There's only one way for a bill to survive to be enacted - pass in committees and on the floors of both chambers - but many ways for them to die. Usually a failed bill is either voted down along the way or it dies of neglect - is not called for a vote in committee or on the floor. Less often, bill sponsors sometimes kill their own bills.

That's what happened to [HB 3560](#), sponsored by [Rep. Monica Bristow](#) (D-Alton), a bill with a reasonable goal that has long been blocked by an unreasonable barrier - a statewide *single-issue* interest group composed of thousands of individuals who care about nothing else but to be left alone as home-schoolers.

It's been a few years since a bill was filed to simply register home-schooled children - mainly as a way of differentiating them from children whose parents just don't bother to send them to school. The sponsoring senator tabled the bill after 6,000 home-school advocates descended on the committee that was hearing it.

Illinois is the only state in which there is no statutory distinction between truants and home-schooled children. The home-schooling community is organized, connected, and absolutely determined that state law will not even mention the phrase "home-schooling," let alone regulate it. To suggest otherwise will cause a scene.

Bristow performed a service just by bringing this issue to the surface. It would be unreasonable to expect her, a rookie member of the Illinois House, to stand up to the home-school parents; single-issue groups never consider compromise, and the home-school advocates are particularly aggressive at the Capitol.

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