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Fwd: CPS strike shines light on class size issue

1 message

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November Board meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>
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CPS strike shines light on class size issue

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The good news for Chicagoans is that the [Chicago Teachers Union strike](#) has ended so nearly 400,000 students were able to return to their Chicago Public Schools classrooms Friday. The other good news is that it's a five-year contract that was reached last week, so the district can get on with more education and less anxiety.

Chicago's new Mayor Lori Lightfoot seems to have performed well in a crisis she inherited that's been building for years. When negotiations between the CTU and the CPS Board needed a boost, she engaged in the process directly. When it was over, she met and chatted with kids as they arrived back at school Friday.

A reporter asked her what did the city "win" in the bargaining? "I refuse to even talk about this in terms of winning and losing," Lightfoot told the Chicago Sun-Times. "Frankly, given what the hardships of our students and our families have endured, it's an offensive term. Nobody wins in a circumstance like this."

Yes, it was stressful. But the 11-day stoppage was, as the media blared, the "longest [CTU strike] in three decades." The track record is not bad. No one says the teachers got more than they deserved, but the hard part's ahead; where will the \$1.5 billion come from to pay for it over the next five years?

Of course, that's always the question.

Part of the cost will be in additional staff, in teachers and teacher aides and nurses and counselors and other supports for students that were included in the CTU demands. That's where most of the budget growth will occur. The CPS will get by with a \$66 million hike in 2020, but the fifth year's growth will be \$500 million.

Staffing increases will address a variety of students' needs, but a major driver is the district's commitment to limit class sizes. It's more than just intuitive. Much research has documented the benefits students derive from just being in smaller classes - although some studies have suggested class size doesn't matter much.

The CPS strike evoked an analysis from [Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach](#), director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University and a professor in the university's School of Education and Social Policy. She authored an article for the online publication [The Conversation](#) examining the class size issue.

So the question is, will smaller class sizes and/or aides for teachers with 32 or more children in the room result in better academic performance - demonstrably more learning - on the part of the students? The answer is, it depends. Shrinking class sizes does not automatically work that way. It has to be done right.

Class size is just one factor in the mix, [Schanzenbach's research](#) suggests. Teacher quality is a key, but if you commit to smaller classes you also are committing to hiring more teachers. That's costly. What if high-quality applicants don't apply for those jobs? Smaller classes also need more classrooms. New buildings? Trailers?

Most research on smaller class sizes projects benefits for students, she wrote. Better math and reading scores. Greater likelihood of advancing to the next grade, of graduating, of enrolling in college. Less likelihood of becoming parents while still in their teens. The benefits vary and tend to persist over time.

[State policy on class sizes varies](#). Texas, for example, sets 22 as the maximum for kindergarten through fourth grade, but waivers to allow larger classes "are easy to obtain." Delaware also limits classes to 22 students per teacher - but it counts a teacher aide as a half-teacher. Illinois has dabbled in class size grant pilots.

The fact is, [as ISNS recently reported](#), Chicago Public School students' academic performance has set a positive example nationwide among urban districts with high percentages of low-income students. Any improvement on that record is likely to be a basis for judging the effectiveness of the new CTU contract.

Even though there is little vetoing to deal with, the Illinois House and Senate were pretty active during last week's opening three days of the 2019 "veto session." They passed a few bills, adding to the 599 they passed in the spring. More bills were filed - but most of the new initiatives will go nowhere.

The most excitement last week was in the area of criminal activities - not bills on crimes committed by others but, rather, reports of suspected crimes perpetrated by Democrat party *members of the House and Senate*. The political implications of all this will be significant. But we'll get to that momentarily.

Bill actions potentially affecting PK-12 students and educators included:

[HB 3935](#), filed Tuesday by [Rep. Stephanie Kifowit](#) (D-Aurora), would require a school resource officer or law enforcement officer to notify a parent prior to the questioning of a student "even if the detainment and questioning is made by another person in the presence of the law enforcement officer." It will pass in 2020.

[SB 460](#), sponsored by [Sen. Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant](#) (D-Plainfield), would require parents of special education students to receive at least three days' notice, *and relevant documents*, in advance, so they can be an "informed participants" in the student's IEP team meetings. The bill passed the Senate 56-0; now it's in the House.

[SB 1970](#), sponsored by [Sen. Elgie Sims](#) (D-Chicago) allows a student who is eligible to vote to get two hours off school for that purpose. The bill passed the House last Tuesday. Gov. JB Pritzker surely will sign it into law. (Significant opposition to the bill was [reflected in the roll calls](#) in both legislative chambers.)

[SB 2276](#), filed by [Sen. Dan McConchie](#) (R-Lake Zurich), would require elementary and high school districts to consolidate into unit districts within three years. The bill was filed last Monday. On a secret ballot this bill might pass, but there are no secret ballots for legislators. This is a bill for "discussion" only. It won't pass.

[SB 2279](#), filed Monday by [Sen. Ann Gillespie](#) (D-Arlington Heights), would clarify that recently passed policy allowing districts to offer hunting safety courses "shall not be construed to allow anyone to bring certain weapons to school." Most likely this bill will carry over into the 2020 spring session, but it's likely to be enacted.

[SB 2281](#), filed Monday by [Sen. Bill Cunningham](#) (D-Chicago) would permit a special education student who turns 22 during the school year to continue to receive services through the end of the school year (rather than until the day before his/her 22nd birthday, as specified in current law).

[SB 2283](#), filed Monday by [Bertino-Tarrant](#) (D-Plainfield) regulates special education services in the Chicago Public Schools and authorizes ISBE to create a telephone "hotline" to field complaints in that regard.

[SB 2288](#), filed Monday by [Sen. Sue Rezin](#) (R-Morris), would ban the sale of any tobacco product, including "e-cigarettes" within 100 feet of any PK-12 school property.

Now, what about that legislator misbehavior? Republican candidates for the House and Senate in 2020 won't have to run directly against their opponents on the ballot. They may well win just by running against their opponents' political party. Democrats have been making news by besmirching their party's brand.

We already knew that [Sen. Tom Cullerton](#) (D-Villa Park) - *who is NOT Senate President John Cullerton*, but is just his distant cousin - faces federal charges of being a Teamsters Union "ghost-payroller." And we knew [Sen. Martin Sandoval](#) (D-Cicero) had his Springfield and district offices raided by federal agents in September.

Now state [Rep. Luis Arroyo](#) (D-Chicago) resigned Friday - even as House Speaker Michael Madigan was filing paperwork to begin his expulsion from the legislature - after he was recorded by the feds in a suspected bribery of another legislator, a Democrat in the Senate who is, *technically*, not yet identified.

The Chicago newspapers - the Tribune and the Sun-Times - have both identified [Sen. Terry Link](#) (D-Gurnee) as the senator who wore a wire while "accepting" a bribe to help the feds incriminate Arroyo, doing so possibly in a deal for a reduction in charges that seem to relate to fraud. Link has vigorously denied those reports.

The reports on Arroyo and Link, of course, just recently arose last week. And the details that are known so far indicate a likelihood that the federal investigative net has been broadly cast. Surely *more bad news is coming*, and if that's the case none of it would likely be favorable to the Democrats of Illinois.

All of this comes after four years in which former Gov. Bruce Rauner spent time and energy and millions of dollars trying to discredit Madigan - the chairman of the Illinois Democrat party whom he falsely accused of corruption in that role. While the effort did not get Rauner reelected, the charge will likely echo during 2020 elections.

Where is all this going? If nothing similarly untoward was affecting elections nationally, you'd predict Illinois Democrats might take a beating next November. But, with the majorities they hold in the House and Senate, it would take a very bad beating to give Republicans control of either chamber.

But of course, similarly untoward issues *are developing to affect the national elections*. Nothing as stressful as President Donald Trump's situation has roiled this country since the "[Watergate scandal](#)" toppled the administration of President Richard Nixon. So there's a cross-current. Outcomes are somewhat unpredictable.

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