



Jim Broadway

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Illinois School News Service

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Federal tax cut bills imperil Illinois schools

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

As the U.S. House and Senate Republicans scramble to see just how large a [Christmas present they can give](#) to the nation's wealthiest citizens and to the corporate community, voices for other interests - healthcare, social services, the environment, and public education - are calculating the pain in store for them.

It's the "trickle down theory" again, the relic of the Reagan Administration that assumes making the rich richer will encourage them to "invest" in the economic infrastructure and create jobs and become the rising tide that lifts all boats. Has this theory ever been validated? No. [The rich just get richer, that's all.](#)

Daniel Katz, chair of the Department of Educational Studies at Seton Hall University, sees the federal tax bill drama as leading to a ["potential disaster](#) for public education funding" at the federal level. The little reasons are plentiful, but the biggest reason is in fact humongous, the "SALT" deduction elimination.

Under current federal law, taxpayers with enough income to itemize their federal tax deductions are permitted to deduct state and local taxes from their federally taxable income. An report by the Government Finance Officers Association says the total of such deductions was nearly \$3.2 billion in Illinois alone. ([See p. 11.](#)) This would increase the federal tax bill by \$6,500 for a family of four living in Barrington on an income of \$250,000 per year. ([See p. 6.](#))

The financial implications of this on education are complicated. As explained by the national ["Education Reform Now"](#) organization, the SALT deduction has a \$1.3 trillion impact over ten years. It is the key to the GOP tax bills' ability to give the super-rich and corporations \$1.5 trillion in tax relief over the next decade.

But that money, analysts say, heavily supports public education. When it is subtracted from the pool of dollars that fund public education from the federal level (via the SALT deduction), it cannot be made up for at the state level. In fact, the pressure will be on state governments to lower their revenue flows.

In effect, according to Education Reform Now writer Michael Dannenberg, SALT deduction elimination is "the beginning of a cycle of disinvestment from public education." It's bipartisan pain, he writes. "This isn't a 'blue' state v. 'red' state issue. This is an issue of do you support public schools or don't you."

The National Education Association has calculated the [impact for every state](#). Illinois, the NEA asserts, would lose more than \$1.6 billion per year under the pending GOP tax-cut bills.

As [The 74 reports](#), there are other dangers for public schools. Expansion of tax breaks for parents sending their children to private schools, for example, is in the package. Adverse tax implications for the purchasers of school construction bonds; public universities and graduate students working in them also get hit hard. The House and Senate disagreed on ending tax deductions for teachers who buy school supplies out of their own pockets - House said yes, Senate no.

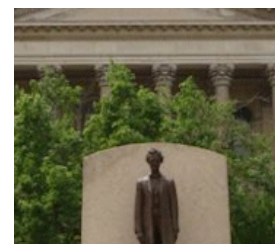
We're reminded of the purported ancient Chinese curse: May you live in interesting times. We will soon learn, in this regard, just how interesting the future is going to be for public education in this nation.

Is Sir Ken Robinson's vision materializing? You know Robinson as a deep thinker whose most popular (15 million views) TED Talk speech has been aligned with rapid animation to describe what he considers flaws in most countries' systems of public education. [Take a look.](#) It takes only 11 minutes, and the time just flies by.

One of the things Robinson rants about is that children are put through an industrial model process, grouped by age, starting at the same time, being taught the same things and waiting until their assembly line brings them to graduation day. The Illinois State Board of Education is testing an alternative to this.

ISBE announced last week plans to accept applications for a second cohort of school districts implementing "competency-based" courses and graduation requirements. When a student demonstrates competency, she graduates. "Seat time" will no longer be the determining factor in that regard.

"This competency-based learning pilot might be the most exciting opportunity available to school districts right now," State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith said. "This pilot allows districts to redesign the high school experience totally around what students know and where they want to go."



Information on the competency-based learning pilot is posted ([here](#)) on the ISBE web site. It includes a detailed "[request for application](#)" form that districts can use to develop a proposal; each participating district is to design for their own students what Smith called a "personalized pathway with no ceiling."

It might be useful to [review the proposals](#) that brought ten districts into the program this year. The Chicago Public School District 299 is one of the 2017 pilot districts, as is East St. Louis School District 189 (where I attended). There are rural and urban districts in the project, large and small districts.

Last week's issue focusing on the teacher shortage evoked a storm of truth-telling from some subscribers. The following is a response from an Illinois school district leader who described the cause-and-effect of it all very succinctly from the perspective of his experience in a profession under duress:

Pension reform [has been] most damaging to the profession. For decades teachers tolerated lower pay and criticism because the light at the end of the tunnel was that I could retire relatively early and I had a good pension that made up for the years of sacrifice accepting a lower wage. Tier II was too extreme of a change. Going from 55 to 67, adding 12 years was too many. No one can chase 1st graders until they are 67.

Business tried to legislate higher performance by making it more difficult to become a teacher. It isn't and didn't work and Administrators and our Associations told the powers that it wouldn't work, but they did it anyway. It is a lot like tax caps and the threat of a freeze. They have done more to raise taxes than lower them.

I now have unqualified teachers working out of their subject areas and vacancies with subs instead of teachers. Education was just legislated to get worse instead of better.

You can review last week's issue at [the ISNS archives](#). You can add your opinion to the stew by filling out and submitting the "contact form" [that you find at this link](#). (By the way, submitting that contact form will trigger an email message to you from my new email address. Use it, but please don't share it.)

A few changes have been made at ISNS. One of them is that my email address, jbroadway@stateschoolnews.com is no more. I'll no longer get email promising a miracle cure for toenail fungus. Or introducing me to young women from various countries. Or letting me in on an investment deal of a lifetime.

Too many snake oil salesmen and roaming Internet robots had tracked me down over the last decade or so. I was receiving fifty meaningless messages for every one that I cared about. It had to stop. Deleting my email address also required me to revise several forms that are used by subscribers for various reasons.

Forms to create new subscriptions, to update the contact data of current subscribers and just to make a comment (whether from a subscriber or just an interested bystander) now appear on web pages that more closely resemble the template that I use each time I create a new issue.

But you will see more opportunities in the future to influence the content and tone of ISNS by completing forms that the newsletter will link you to. In some cases I'll ask your opinions on current political or social questions. In other cases I'll be asking if you want to participate in a "side-conversation" on matters of mutual interest.

What is a side-conversation? It is a give-and-take involving me and any others who wish to participate. I'll introduce the topic in the context of a newsletter, like this one, but then participants in a resulting discussion will take it elsewhere, not bothering other subscribers (and copyright violators) who are not interested.

Some side-conversations may just be too unpleasant for some subscribers to participate in. The subject I'm about to introduce - my mortality - might be one that some folks might prefer to just avoid. I can understand that, but at my age (74) it's just not something I can ignore. And it may have relevance to you.

Back when I was approaching 65, I asked readers what should be done - long-term - with ISNS. Some said I should sell it to a good journalist. Others favored transferring ownership to a non-profit organization. One subscriber just urged me to eat nutritious food, exercise regularly and just keep writing.

Well, that was a decade ago. I plan to be around for years to come, but things don't always work out as planned. If I reach my expiration date sooner, what should happen to ISNS? Is there an individual or non-profit out there that I can will it to? This discussion might take some time. Willing [participants should register here](#).

Strong support of science will be a characteristic of ISNS in 2018 and beyond. [Here's an excellent site](#) that gives brief science lessons - almost always based on current news reports - that demonstrate the role of science in our society. That is especially important when [so many of our "leaders" are anti-science](#).

ISNS archives back through 2015 are available again for subscribers. You remember the process. Go to [this web page](#). Remember, this page location is a secret, just between us insiders, so don't go blabbing it around. Thanks. - Jim

Invoice Reminder: All invoices for subscription fees will be emailed via the PNC Bank, which now handles my accounts. THERE WILL BE NO PAPER INVOICE MAILED TO YOU. If you lose your invoice, use the contact link and tell me to resend it. I deeply appreciate your support of ISNS. This service cannot exist without you.

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](#).