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Fwd: Pritzker is pro-public schools - if he's not lying

1 message

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Wed, Dec 12, 2018 at 7:50 AM

December board meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>
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Pritzker is pro-public schools - if he's not lying

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Two of Illinois' last three governors have been compulsive liars - and the other was a lightweight gadfly whose elevation to the state's top political office resulted from a political crime spree of historical significance (see below). What will J.B. Pritzker, our incoming governor, be like? We'll see. It may be refreshing.

To obfuscate is to beat around the bush a bit. Would J.B. do that? Sure. In response to a question about the state's role regarding racial segregation in housing and schools, Pritzker blurred [the entire fourth page](#) of a questionnaire from the [Raise Your Hand Action](#) organization - and he never really answered the question.

It was a tough question. There's no politically comfortable answer to that one, at least not one that would fit in a response less than two or three hundred pages long. J.B. was more direct in his response to a question about his support - or his lack of support - for policy to weaken the Illinois State Charter School Commission:

"I support the elimination of the Illinois State Charter School Commission," is all he wrote. My point is this: When you're not going to be responsive, you either lie (like Blagojevich or Rauner) or you obfuscate. Regarding the charter commission, Pritzker did neither. That suggests his actions will match his words on that one.

You are strongly encouraged to review J.B.'s answers to the [excellent RYH interrogatories](#). The document is only six page long; all the questions are about public education and what he thinks its

purpose is and what policies he believes would achieve its purpose. And J.B. *will be Illinois' governor* as of January 14.

You are also encouraged to become familiar with RYH Action's parent organization, the [Raise Your Hand](#) for Illinois Public Education coalition. Their focus is largely on Chicago, it is true, but important work that they do affects schools and school districts and children and parents throughout the state.

Every person and organization involved in public education in Illinois benefits from RHY, from its unswerving dedication to its mission, from its sophisticated and effective efforts at the state Capitol in Springfield, from the continuous information flow in support of public schools. It's not an old group, but it is an influential one.

You'll appreciate RYH whether or not you [support it in a tangible way](#). The organization has helped inform my coverage of state school policy matters, so I made a small (very small) gesture in that regard. They didn't exist when I launched ISNS, but I'm confident they'll be around long after I've departed the scene.

Getting back to Pritzker, [you'll find on his web site](#) many direct and substantive statements reflecting what he says is his thinking on state policy issues - although not much on education policy. In those statements, he's given Illinois journalists, and citizens in general, plenty to hold him accountable for in the next four years.

I know, I promised last week I wouldn't bother you again until January. But it's the season of giving. I want to give you information that will be useful to you in 2019. Here, for example, is [the House calendar](#) for the coming legislative session. Senate session days are noted in red. (Okay, [here's the Senate version](#).)

Note that the current 100th General Assembly will convene January 7-8. That's fairly unusual. "Lame duck" sessions are usually reserved for big deals. What might they consider at that time? An "infrastructure" bill (roads, bridges, mass transit and related stuff) seems likely. As usual, Gov. Bruce Rauner is conflicted.

The current governor would approve a huge program of upgrading transportation facilities, [but he is opposed to raising](#) the revenue needed to pay for it. Usually, bills must do both. But there are many "lame duck" legislators, folks who can vote on January 7-8 but won't even have a desk after that; they may be instrumental in passing a package of capital projects and funding, and *then help to override a veto* of the funding part. (Yes, such things have happened before.)

There is no "State of the State" message scheduled for Pritzker to deliver. The thinking must be, "What does he know?" But he does deliver a "Budget Address." That will be February 20, and it's a very big deal. The governor's budget proposal will drive almost all subsequent policy decisions - including school funding.

Speaking of school funding, the Illinois State Board of Education is to convene at 10:30 today, and the most significant item [on its agenda](#) (see pp. 4-26) would be a review and discussion of factors affecting the agency's FY 2020 school funding recommendation, which is due for a vote by the board on January 16.

The agenda linked above would be interesting reading on a cold winter's night over the holidays. On page 4 you can see the erratic rise and fall and rise of the state General Revenue Fund in recent years, leading to a significant rise after the state emerged (with help from GOP legislators) from the ditch Rauner dug.

The next page has a pie chart showing that 98.22% of state school funding goes to "evidence-based funding" (EBF), mandated categorical programs and early childhood education. Those expenditures, combined with stuff supported by folks who attended ISBE budget hearings, push fiscal needs off the charts.

State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith and ISBE Chief Financial Officer Robert Wolfe wrote the agenda item and loaded it with tons of data and equity rationale. That's how they arrived at \$660 million as the "minimum increase for the EBF" line in FY 2020. (That would be another courageous ISBE proposal.)

An audio to the board meeting will be posted on the [ISBE home page](#).

Finding a safe route to and from school can be a challenge in an urban area. The streets of East St. Louis were daunting to me even back in the 1950s, and today's dangers seem to be at a multiple of the stress I encountered. But policymakers have finally responded, and this segment [focuses on a Chicago program](#).

University of Maryland Assistant Professor F. Chris Curran begins his report with a chilling reference to a recent attempted [kidnapping on Chicago's south side](#). But rather than get into the van as ordered, the 15-year-old girl ran to an adult in a yellow shirt, a Chicago Public Schools "Community Watch" safety guard.

Chicago's "Safe Passage" program, launched after the nation-gripping murder of [honor student Derrion Albert](#) in 2009, places 1,350 adult monitors [on streets](#) leading to 159 schools, to help children and to contact police to report crime. At \$10.50/hour per worker, it costs CPS \$354,000 per week - but it seems worth it.

Curran's report summarizes nearly a decade's experience. The benefits go far beyond merely making the children safe, as if that were not enough. Crime along "safe passage routes" has dropped by 32% since 2012. Curran's studies found street crimes were reduced on those dangerous routes *even on weekends*.

[Other research reinforces](#) Curran's findings and documents educational impact - such as steep declines in students' absenteeism and resulting learning improvement - as well as the cost benefits.

Snippets (mostly useful information sources):

Articles on (usually) timely topics, written by academics nationwide who (usually) have nothing to gain from writing them except the feeling of having made a contribution to societal understanding, are published by [The Conversation](#), the non-profit provider of the piece above on Chicago's safe streets effort.

The reports are written by experts and often with a problem's solution suggested. For example, here's a study report about how people - especially teens - can [raise their happiness levels](#). The [author](#) (San Diego State psychologist) reported on a study in which "every activity that didn't involve a screen was linked to more happiness."

Science seems to be under siege these days. Even federal [agencies are now expressing alarm](#) about it. A source of (usually) timely science news - freely available and presented with flair - is at [LiveScience.com](#). Advertisers pay the freight and those of us who like accurate depictions of the real world benefit.

Another excellent source of information and guidance for writers and researchers is the [Journalist's Resource](#) site at the Harvard Kennedy School's Schorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy. I've visited this site often. They offer tips for learning about most societal interest, [including education](#), of course.

Finding the seeds of human traits in the interactions of other primates is one of the gifts delivered by Dutch/American biologist [Dr. Frans De Waal](#). A Georgia resident now, De Waal immigrated in 1981. Which of his books do I recommend? Any of them, but [Our Inner Ape](#) offers much to think about.

Can you enjoy reading a ranking of 100 Christmas songs? Yes, I believe so, if the writer is [columnist Alexandra Petri](#). Still, some of you may find it unsettling to hear that the fourth-best song, in her view, is one that "has always read as passive-aggressive to me, and I find that enjoyable."

Blagojevich arrested ten years ago. [Sunday was the 10th anniversary](#) of that day in 2008 when the arrest of Gov. Rod Blagojevich shocked Illinois. It was hardly surprising to those of us who had been documenting his misdeeds and reporting on the federal investigation that was closing in on the oblivious "Blago." The arrest set up a series of events and reactions by Blagojevich that the nation followed gleefully and resulted, eventually, in a 14-year prison sentence.

Why did Willie Sutton rob banks? As he said, "[Because](#) that's where the money is." Why do pedofiles and sex abusers so often work in youth ministries, scouting organizations and, yes, schools? Because that's where the children are. This is [just one of many examples](#). Unfortunately, he [cut a deal and got off light](#).

Links to newsletters posted so far this year are available [at this web page link](#). Please remember that *current* ISNS archives are for our subscribers only; *do not share this link*. But all 2017 issues can be found [HERE](#). You *may share the 2017 archives web page link* with anyone who wants to see it.

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