



Jim Broadway

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Illinois School News Service

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Volume 24, Number 35, May 30, 2018

FY 2019 school funding hike \$50 million less?

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The legislative "budgeteers" - lawmakers involved in the massive and highly detailed process of assembling a budget for FY 2019, a document sure to run nearly 1,000 pages in length - [seem confident about agreements](#) on the finer points being reached in time for the House and Senate to vote on it Thursday.

1,000 pages? Can the legislators read all that in less than a day?

Anyway, there are some wrinkles to be ironed out. What will it cost to replace the Illinois Veterans Home in Quincy? Will the Barack Obama Presidential Library in Chicago receive any state support? How will the \$63 million payment ordered by the court for union members' back-pay be handled? The budgeteers will decide.

To quell rampant rumors, Sen. Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill) declared that there will be no increase in motor fuel taxes, or any other general taxes, to fund parts of the budget. There will be a bill, or several bills, surfacing either late today or early Thursday. There will be bipartisan (but far from unanimous) support.

What about the \$50 million question? Will the school funding increase of \$350 million, established in last year's law as an annual increase through 2027, be fully allocated to the PK-12 public schools? Or will \$50 million of it be diverted, also per last year's law, to build a property tax relief fund?

As you know, there was a [lot of discussion about that issue](#) in the House appropriations committee on PK-12 education last week. One expert after another testified that, while the policymakers are to be applauded for passing the landmark legislation last year, it's important to "at least" keep the \$350 million for schools.

But there was no hint in communication from the Republican members of the committee that the GOP caucus would stand for that. They think a separate appropriation for property tax relief - a major demand of Gov. Bruce Rauner's - would cause the total of "new" funding to hit \$400 million. But \$350 million's their limit.

I'm guessing that matter has already been decided in the budget negotiations involving Rauner and the four partisan caucus leaders - House Speaker Micael Madigan, House Minority Leader Jim Durkin, Senate President John Cullerton and Senate Minority Leader Bill Brady. *The GOP leaders will get their way.*

Look at it this way. The promise was false from the start. First of all, don't use the word "equity" at all. That was never part of the deal. The promise was that, over a period of a decade, funding would be increased to the point of "adequacy" for the least affluent Illinois school district to educate its children.

That's a pretty modest goal, and a lot of time was given to reach it. Children currently in that "least affluent" district will see no benefit to speak of. The "winners" will be those kids who enter preschool ten years from now. But even at that, the policymakers consciously "codified" *pitifully inadequate increases* in funding.

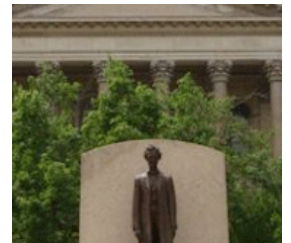
Do the math. The State Board of Education courageously demonstrated this year that it would take a total of \$7 billion in school funding increases to reach that goal of adequacy for the poorest district in 10 years. But \$350 million a year for a decade gets you only halfway there. Assuming that you don't siphon off a half-billion dollar total for property tax relief. And assuming that there is no inflation to erode the purchasing power of the money by 2027.

From the start, the promise of "evidence-based funding" has been false. The concept is amazingly true, but the allocations that have apparently been agreed upon to make it work have been deliberately set way too low. The policymakers who made those agreements will, most of them, be gone by 2027, retired or resigned.

Remember, that's how they handled the [pension system "bailout"](#) of 1995.

Of course, I could be wrong in believing that school funding increases won't be eroded by \$50 million in the state budget for 2019. I hope I am mistaken. But we'll see. I'll give you my take on the final outcome in a newsletter Friday morning. Many school related bills - some good, some not so good - remain pending.

Being "on the ballot" can motivate officials to take some questionable actions. Consider, for example, the commitment of a "sports instruction" company called "TAC Ops" in Ramsey to provide [free concealed carry certification](#) training for any school teachers or administrators, ostensibly for the safety of children.



The theory seems to be that the more guns are around the safer the kids will be. But this group is not alone in subscribing to this opinion. They are offering this free service: "In conjunction with Chris Smith for Fayette County Sheriff 2018, Josh Morrison Fayette County States Attorney, Jason Plummer for State Senate 54th District, and Blain Wilhour for State Representative 107th District." So, apparently, this offer is to promote their political campaigns.

We recently noted how good ideas can be difficult to describe and how bad ideas can "feel good" as public policy. In my view, this part of the listed political campaigns is an excellent example. None of these people are expert enough to know the effects their "solution" to school violence would have on schools.

But there are experts in this area, and they tend to believe that "hardening" schools as a target for violence damages the mission of the schools and harms the children. [Managing the school environment](#), in ways that have been researched, is the key to preventing the kind of violence that has become so fearful.

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