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Fwd: School funding still 'inadequate' for most kids

1 message

Jason Bauer <jbauer@panaschools.com> Fri, Jun 21, 2019 at 8:21 AM
To: Nicole Blodgett <nblodgett@panaschools.com>

June Board Meeting

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>
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To: <jbauer@panaschools.com>

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School funding still 'inadequate' for most kids

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Back in 2017, I asked Sen. Andy Manar what it would take to bring all schoolchildren's education up to "adequacy" under his Evidence-Based Funding proposal, and do it by 2027. The state would have to add more than $600 million, every year, to the ISBE budget line for funds distributed to the school districts.

The EBF bill passed in a compromised form, and the decision was made to increase that budget line by $350 million per year (with $50 million of that to be used for property tax relief), which means that the adequacy target year of 2027 (which remained in the bill as it passed) could not be met. *Not even half-met.*

The deciders - the guy who was governor at that time and the four legislative caucus leaders - had concluded that it would be best to just *promise* adequacy-for-all in ten years, while smiling about a bill that would in fact take *at least twenty* (not counting for inflation). Then they said "it was good," and it so was good.

But at their meeting this week, members of the Illinois State Board of Education chatted a bit about that adequacy thing, and they learned some more about the math. Starting now, to reach the goal by 2027, the annual hike in school funding would need to be bumped up to $660 million, ISBE CFO Robert Wolfe told the board.

What is that EBF adequacy goal, anyway? To count the cost of requirements for adequate schooling (based on a number of best practices and socioeconomic factors), an "adequacy target" has been established for every school. The 2027 goal is for the state to bring all school districts up to 90% of their targets, Wolfe said.

Why just 90%? Federal funds are expected to pay about 10%. The state is currently $4.83 billion away from meeting that goal, Wolfe said, so only about 200 school districts (those with powerful property tax bases) are funded to at least 90% of their adequacy targets; 655 districts - serving *81% of the students* - are not.

As State Journal-Register staff writer Cassie Buchman reported, Rep. Will Davis (D-East Hazel Crest), House sponsor of the EBF bill, urged the State Board to "have a different discussion" with Gov. JB Pritzker and legislators about the ISBE budget. Davis perhaps was referring to the Board's action shortly after it was formed.

A current law (enacted at the insistence of former Gov. George Ryan) lets governors appoint a new State Board majority soon after taking office. Pritzker replaced all but one board member, appointed Darren Reisberg as SBE chair and saw to it that Carmen Ayala was hired as the new State Superintendent of Schools.

The new board then changed the agency's budget proposal so that the EBF line item for FY 2020 was reduced from the $11.765 billion recommended by the out-going board to the $7.2 billion amount identical to what Pritzker had proposed in February. (It was, I believe, an unprecedented action by a State Board.)

Former State Superintendent Tony Smith and the State Board chaired by former state Sen. James Meeks had consistently recommended that the EBF line item be enough to achieve the 90% of adequacy target for every district - knowing those billions could not be appropriated - just to keep everyone's eye on the goal.

Reisberg noted that the new board members will "enter our first budget season [this] fall ... so that we can together start to identify what the priorities are and how we can work with the General Assembly." For FY 2020 budgeting, he said, "we came in at the tail end of the process, which wasn't ideal." (More OJT needed.)

Whither now? Perhaps the Reisberg board will restore the practice of letting the policymakers know - by the amount they propose for the EBF line - the true cost of "adequacy." Will so much ever happen? If the graduated tax proposal is ratified by the voters in 2020, perhaps. If not, even the $350 million is in dire peril.

The late-career pay cap increase is a sore spot. The editors of the Chicago Sun-Times, normally a reasonable and even somewhat liberal group, went over the edge last week about the legislation raising from 3% to 6% the amount of a pay increase school districts can give educators without any pension penalty.

If you clicked the link, you noticed that the newspaper revived "Squeezy the Python," that cheesy cartoon character created in the Pat Quinn Administration in 2012, when Quinn was leading the charge for an unconstitutional plan to cut the state's pension bills simply by violating the pension members' contracts.

All this reminds me: I first attended a school board meeting in 1970 as a new reporter for the *Edwardsville Intelligencer*. We had seven school districts in the coverage area of the Edwardsville "I" and they were my "beat." Educators are good explainers. I did learn a lot about public school teachers in a relatively short time.

I learned quickly that the teachers were not in it for the money. They were *almost* as poorly paid as newspaper reporters. That's not changed. It fluctuates, but late last year Money.Com reported that teachers earn about 18% less than college graduates with comparable training and even less responsibility.

Still the job had some positive features. There was the guaranteed **pension,** to which the educators always contributed, providing a secure and comfortable (if not opulent) retirement. They also were "off" in **summer** (although many teachers had to take summer jobs), a perk that many in the private sector envy.

There was this magical thing called "**tenure**." If you did the job well, after four years it *became your job*. Sure, the district could terminate you, but it would take a team of lawyers to pry you out. Your union would send in experienced lawyers to represent you. Rightfully, it took a truly serious "cause" to fire a teacher.

Now, there were ways to earn more as a teacher. You might get paid more as your years of experience mounted up; you could move up the salary step ladder by getting more education, a masters degree for example. Real wealth would never happen, but you weren't stuck on the bottom rung forever.

Once you had your teaching "certificate" and tenure, all you had to do was your job. Well, you did have to pay the state's $4 fee to renew your cerrtificate every year, but that was about it. Districts and regional superintendents hosted seminars by way of professional development; they helped, but posed no threat to your job.

The "perks" of teaching are mostly eroded or gone now. Tenure is history. The certificate turned into a "license" that must be "renewed" by completing an "approved professional development plan" every five years. The pension is grimly eroded for new hires; it's no longer a good talking point for recruiting.

The pay is still marginal for many young educators. But the legislature passed HB 2078 this year, to increase the minimum wage of full-time teachers from the current statutory minimum ($10,000/year), in increments, to $40,000 in the 2023-2024 school year. That may add some flow through the teacher prep pipeline.

There's been a ton of research on the subject of teachers' pay and its effects on recruitment and retention, on measures of teacher competence and even on students' learning achievements. Salary-setting experts know what, based on many factors, a practitioner *should* make. Credible analyses still say teachers are short-changed.

Where is that minimum wage bill, HB 2078? It's one of the 599 bills that were passed so far by the 101st Illinois General Assembly. At this writing, most were still in the custody of the legislature; House and Senate leaders have 30 days to send them to the governor He's signed 18 - four House bills, 14 Senate bills.

Now I want to write about a governor, a Democrat governing a state in the Midwest. He campaigned on a platform designed to change his state's trajectory in many ways. His state's debts were billions of dollars deep, and structural deficits simply added to its fiscal miseries every year. He had a remedy for that.

He wanted to raise taxes on the rich. Leaders of the Republican caucuses opposed that, arguing instead for tax cuts that would "grow the state's economy" and pay down the debts. The Democrat governor wanted to raise the minimum wage for the least affluent workers. Republicans opposed that too.

The Democrat governor envisioned a massive infrastructure renewal program - roads, bridges, mass transit, construction and renovation of public facilties - that would put tens of thousands of workers in high-paying jobs. Even that proposal was controversial as opponents wondered aloud about the funding

He had progressive social goals, too, championing legislation that would boost state support for education by billions of dollars each year, and that would end discrimination based on gender and sexual identity. He staked out a difficult agenda of public policy - but in his eight years as governor, he achieved much of it.

Eight years? But JB Pritzker is just getting started. So now it's clear that this has not been about JB. No, I've been writing about Gov. Mark Dayton, the Minnesotan who returned to private life this year after two tumultuous terms. He struggled a lot, sometimes *even with fellow Democrats*, but he accomplished a lot too.

The $6.2 billion budget deficit of eight years ago turned into a $1.5 billion surplus - with reserves of $2 billion - in his last budget year. He did tax the rich, which helped him increase public education funding by $2 billion. He did get the massive public works program off the ground. He signed the gay marriage law.

The last public opinion poll measured Dayton's job-approval rating at 57%, a lofty figure considering that *only 39% had a "favorable" opinion of him personally*. How did he get elected? The Republicans before him may have been less interested in governing than in wrestling (Jesse Ventura) or running for president (Tim Pawlenty).

How is Pritzker different from Dayton? Let me count the ways. He's younger and richer, more able to work with others (with fellow Democrats, of course, but also with Republicans) and his party holds all statewide political offices and super majorities in both legislative chambers. Those are huge negotiating assets.

The effects of Pritzker's agenda, most of which was advanced in his first few months in office, remain to be seen. But the positive consequences of Dayton's achievements should be indicative. Did being taxed more drive away all of the wealthy Minnesota businessmen? Not at all. The state's economy just improved.

Couldn't the economy have been "grown" just by cutting taxes, as the Republican caucuses in Minnesota (and Illinois) so vigorously assert? It's hard to assess the consequences of policy not implemented, but there are examples. The "Kansas Experiment" in tax-cutting "crashed and burned," as Forbes reported.

[NOTE: The 2017 Forbes article reported that Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback was the nation's *second-lowest* rated sitting governor. Who was the *lowest*? Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner.]

And, contrary to loud and false claims by the current president, the largest tax cut ever in U.S. history (benefiting mostly wealthy Americans) was enacted in the administration of the only president to have been born in Illinois. Ronald Reagan's tax policy slashed the top marginal rate from 70% all the way to 38.5%.

The "promise" then was that rich guys would invest more in the economy, creating more high-paying jobs, and the tax cut's benefits would "trickle down" to the rest of us. But as Professor Joseph E. Stiglitz, winner of the 2001 Nobel Prize in Economics, explains, only the wealthy have since fared very well.

The Pritzker graduated income tax plan would take *just the thinnest sliver* of what Reagan gave to his rich friends.

NOTE: EXPECTING AN INVOICE? I'll get to that Monday. It's June 21, the first day of summer! I'm going to visit my daughter Amy in St. Louis. Monday: *Count on it*.

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