



Jim Broadway

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## Illinois School News Service

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### The bill may be bad, but it spins nicely

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[NOTE: School Code-amending bills that have passed the Illinois House and Senate [can be seen at this link](#).]

Years ago, as many of you know, I chaired the board for the [Illinois Coalition for Community Services](#). In that role I learned that many children in Illinois don't get much to eat except at school. We had more than 50 "summer food" sites in place around the state. Our "backpack" programs helped kids on weekends.

The ICCS board was proud of those services, so you can imagine my initial reaction to [SB 2428](#), a bill with the act title of "The Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act." Briefly, the bill requires a school to give a lunch to any student who asks for one, without regard to eligibility for a free or reduced-price lunch.'

What could be more satisfying than to feed a hungry child? The bill just "sounds right." And that's sort of unfortunate, because there are some major problems with it. It's an unfunded state mandate, for one thing. For another, it does not say how the mandate is to be achieved, and that is a problem without a simple solution.

Most of the [committee witnesses who expressed themselves](#) on this bill were in favor of it. But none of them would have to provide the free lunches and then figure out how to collect the money from the children's parents or in others ways pay for the lunches. Federal reimbursement? Sure, but that's just pennies on the dollar.

**I do not doubt the sincerity of the sponsors** of SB 2428. Most of them are in the [Illinois Legislative Black Caucus](#); they know a thing or two about the relationship between poverty and hunger. They also know, unfortunately, the emotional trauma about being singled out negatively; the bill addresses that, too.

At the same time, the opponents - the Statewide School Management Alliance, some other organizations representing school administrators and some school district officials, mainly - make a strong point. So did the legislators who opposed the bill on the floor of the House, all of whom are Republicans.

So, while I don't suspect the motives of the sponsors, I do suspect the motives of House Speaker Michael Madigan and Senate President John Cullerton. I see some major league potential for hard-hitting political campaign brochures in the roll calls recorded when the bill came to a vote in the [Senate](#) and the [House](#).

Sure, a couple of Republican House members voted for the bill, and a few GOP senators did so as well. But Republicans were alone in casting votes against the bill - nine in the Senate and 44 in the House. All of them could be accused (fairly or not) of being insensitive to the hunger of schoolchildren.

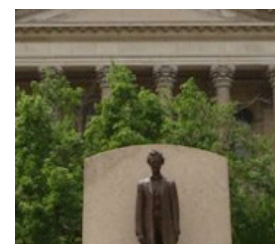
**At this writing, the bill has not yet finished** its journey. The Senate still must concur with an amendment attached to it in the House. But that seems certain to happen by midnight Thursday, the deadline for the session to be adjourned. After the concurrence, the bill would go to Gov. Bruce Rauner for his consideration.

What is Rauner to do? Most of his GOP colleagues have withheld support, or actively opposed the bill. The management leaders of the public education system have weighed in against it. On its merits, he should veto it. But then Rauner would have just one more strike against him as he seeks reelection in November.

Here's the reality. When the rationale for opposing a bad bill is complicated, voters will join in the criticism of those who voted against it. (The reverse is also true. The reasons for many a bill being excellent are often so complicated that voters will be easily persuaded by demagogues to oppose legislators advocating them.)

The voters in the districts of nine GOP senators and 44 GOP House members surely will see brochures describing how stingy and hard-hearted these legislators must be. Meanwhile, if the bill becomes law, I know the school leaders of Illinois will somehow make it work. They've done it so often before. ([Think NCLB](#).)

**At this writing, 33 School Code-amending bills** have "[passed both houses](#)," have received majority votes (most of them overwhelming majority votes) and their next stop will be Rauner's desk. The legislative leaders have 30 calendar days to deliver passed bills to Rauner, and he has 60 days to decide whether to sign or veto them. What happens if he vetoes one? It can get pretty complicated. We'll address that question if a veto occurs.



Meanwhile, both chambers have some work to do between now and Thursday's scheduled adjournment. While a few of the pending School Code bills have been dismissed in the process, a couple dozen or so remain viable. And, of course, a balanced, pro-education budget for FY 2019 still must be enacted.

As folks who watch the ugly policy process know, Tuesday is way too soon for the details of a budget that must be passed by Thursday to reach the surface for scrutiny. Neither the public nor members of the minority party (especially not them) will see the thousand pages of appropriations until Wednesday night or so.

Although there will be some strident debate in opposition (at least from Rep. Jeanne Ives), it still seems all but certain that a full-year budget will pass the House and Senate (probably with some GOP votes). Rauner will sign it, although a bit reluctantly, perhaps, mainly because of its benefits for public education.

**A word to the stupid: (The wise already know this.)** Whether or not you think you've done anything wrong, even to be *accused* of [sexual predation against a child](#) would be a disaster for you. If you are an educator, your career is over. If adjudication is pursued and you are convicted, your life is ruined.

And that is how it should be, because you've ruined the life of a child. Even if you think of your predation of the child as "consensual," the wounds you have inflicted will never heal. Sure, you will pay for the rest of your life, but so will the child. Understand this as well: *you will find no sympathy, ever, anywhere.*

In a crisis-management course I designed and presented years ago, I pointed out that children are one of the two most "protected" of all social classes. (The other, properly, is us old folks.) By protected, I mean many things, but one of them is that people who've abused children are dealt with in very harsh ways.

If your thoughts are occasionally such that the rest of us would find disgusting, you'd best just stay away from children.

Longtime readers know I generally frown on "zero tolerance" policies. But this case is an exception. Part of the problem is that child predators typically [cast themselves as kid-friendly](#). They are youth ministers or camp counselors or baby sitters or, yes, teachers. This only adds to the public's disdain when they are caught.

All educators, especially administrators and counselors, should also *be aware of your own vulnerability*. Do not take a chance on being misunderstood or falsely accused. Leave your office door open when conversing with a youth. Have a witness to your interaction. Keep good notes. Your career is at stake.

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