



Jim Broadway

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## Illinois School News Service

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### Illinois school data law cited as model

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

[Last week's salvo](#) against the Illinois General Assembly - all that hot rhetoric about decades of "school policy malpractice" and suggestions that one might just as well reside in Mississippi - let's hope that is my final rant of 2016. I won't hit the roof again unless something happens that really locks my jaws.

Of course, even in this "season of good will," jaw-locking incidents are always possible.

But let's exhibit the Audacity of Hope (rather than the more rational Audacity of Doubt) and look for something positive to occur when the state's spending authority (for everything except PK-12 education) hits the brick wall of New Year's Day. Will some policy emerge to parachute the state to a soft landing?

Despite what I implied last week, the unlikely is still possible. A "Grand Bargain Christmas Miracle"? Don't hold your breath for that. But yet another "Picayune Bargain" - another stop-gap, unfunded period of bare-bones penury for all who look to the state for services they rightfully expect - yeah, that's possible.

**But what about the ban on lame-duck** session revenue increases? [HR 1494](#) has meaning only in the political sense that it is the smoke of the smoke-and-mirrors partnership. House Speaker Michael Madigan would never allow a major revenue increase to pass without demanding lots of Republican votes to support it.

Pushing the threshold for lame-duck passage of income tax increases from 60 to 71 votes in the House (the effect of the resolution that led to so much bipartisan self-aggrandizing last week) merely means that a few more legislators from each caucus would be required to participate on the record.

Another, perhaps even more important point, is the careful language of HR 1494. The super-majority vote requirement it imposes applies only to the "income tax." There are many other ways to generate enough revenue for a picayune deal. Also, notice that it *applies only to the 2017* lame-duck session. It's just the smoke.

I think the lawmakers will [convene as lame ducks](#) January 9 and 10 and codify another stop-gap spending plan. There may be some revenue to fund part of it (but not from income taxes), or our leaders (?) may just let the debt pile up. How much more is \$20 billion than \$14 billion, really, when you think about it?

**Oh, was I ranting again? I'm sorry.** As the "headline" atop this commentary indicates, Illinois school policy has been recognized as exceptional with respect to data, specifically the "report card" data that is available to the public for each school and school district and for the state as a whole.

The story begins with [a recent NPR article](#) that included an opinion to that effect that the school-related data that is distributed in "your state" (but obviously not meaning to refer to Illinois) is "probably not" very good.

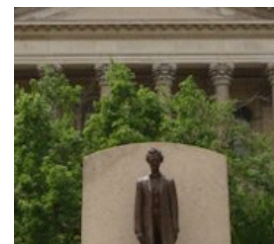
This opinion was based on research by a non-profit called the "[Data Quality Campaign](#)," which has a most impressive [array of "partners"](#) and believes students will "excel" when "students, parents, educators, and policymakers have the right information to make decisions." (There's some hype in this, but more on that later.)

The campaign [has a strong message](#) about how clear messages about how their children are faring in school enables parents to engage effectively with the education process and guide their children along a path of success. In most states, the DQC finds, [such messages are unavailable](#) to stakeholders.

**The campaign is trying to start conversation** in states where the report cards fall short, where they lack important information or what they do provide is unclear, or even meaningless. They have posted checklists of information that should be provided, and they have cited examples of good state policy.

That is where Illinois comes in. Ours is one of a handful of states listed in "[State Report Card Bright Spots](#)," a report of a half-dozen or so states that developed excellent report cards.

There's also a "[show me the data](#)" page that provides resources and offers advice for folks who live in states where the report cards are pretty meaningless, telling them how they can encourage their policymakers to improve. In the "Take Action" section of that page you'll find a [link to the Illinois report card law](#).



Yes, it was [HB 605](#), which passed in 2011 under the effective sponsorship of state [Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia](#) (D-Aurora) in the House and of state [Sen. Kimberly Lightford](#) (Westchester) in the Senate. Not a vote was cast against the bill on the floor or in committee in either chamber.

**Intractable gridlock is a common image** of the Illinois General Assembly, but bipartisan focusing on the policy under consideration - Does it meet our goal? Do we have the correct goal? - has been the rule in the education committees of both chambers for many years. HB 605 is just one conspicuous example.

It's mostly just the budget issues and the business-versus-workers issues where the partisan lines are drawn and the policymakers' heels get dug in. The legislature is not totally dysfunctional, and there are many instances in which the lawmakers produce policy that serves as a model for the nation.

But what about that argument that students "excel" when excellent information is available to all the stake-holders? Consider the logical concepts of ["necessary" and "sufficient."](#) The latter is the ultimate goal. The data may be necessary, but it is not "sufficient" to make all students thrive.

The DQC message needs to begin with the common qualifier, "all other things being equal." There's the rub. For children in Illinois (and most other states), all other things are not even close to equal. The dream of closing achievement gaps will remain elusive until about a hundred types of inequality are addressed.

**Speaking of this "season of good will,"** I want to direct your attention to a worthy cause to which I will contribute this month, and I hope some of you will too. It is a cause that is close to my heart in many ways.

You may recall that my mother, Betty June Broadway, died last month at 92. She had a wonderful life of bringing joy and, when needed, assistance to everyone she met. Mom was particularly proud to be with me in 2013 when I was "roasted" as a fund-raising activity for the [Illinois Coalition for Community Services](#).

Who was the Primary Roaster? None other than Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia. Oh, she burned me to a crisp.

The ICCS has a variety of programs to help people of many communities in about 80 counties of Illinois, mostly children. The organization has had to cut back, as have other non-profits during the state's budget crisis, but it has hung in there and continues to serve. As ICCS board president, I am proud of this.

Anyway, [as Mom's obituary notes](#), she wished that any memorial donations would be made to the ICCS and a couple of other organizations with special relevance to her. Here's [the link to the ICCS "donate" page](#). I hope you use it. If so, put a note about memorializing Betty Broadway in the memo field. Thank you. - Jim

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