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# Illinois SCHOOL BOARD News Blog

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Tuesday, April 11, 2017

## Lawmakers propose new school mandates but still haven't approved a budget

*IASB Deputy Executive Director Ben Schwarm comments on the stalled state budget and the prospect of more unfunded mandates for schools, while urging board members and administrators to contact lawmakers about the issues.*

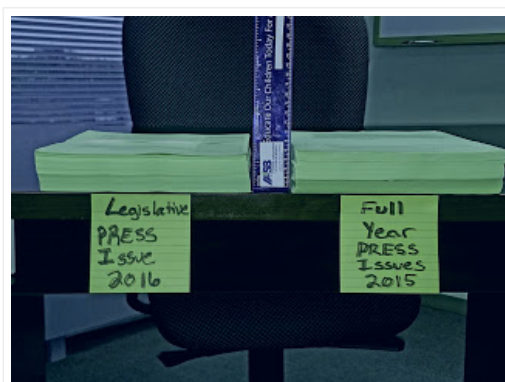


Ben Schwarm

As the Illinois General Assembly begins its two-week break, it is a good time to assess what our lawmakers have been up to the past three months. Unfortunately, it is much more of the same we have seen over the past several years.

First, let's start with what the legislature has **not** done. Number one on that list would be **approving a state budget!** Illinois will soon be at two full years without an adopted, balanced budget. The result is a deficit in the tens of billions of dollars and growing by the day. Hopes of a grand bargain early this year eventually melted away and few see any chance of this discussion being seriously renewed. In fact, some see hopes of salvaging portions of the compromise, such as new reliable revenues and school funding reform, as being tossed by the wayside as well.

So what has been done? We can start with the introduction of over 6,000 bills – many of which would establish new programs and directives that would add to state spending which is already in deficit mode. Or, ideas that pass the cost onto local governments and school districts that are already suffering due to the budget situation and years of under-funding.



The above picture highlights the number of school policies added last year due to laws approved in 2016.

Though the School Management Alliance has been successful in stopping a few bills that contained new mandate proposals (must waive summer school costs, must post nutrition counts, must adopt trauma response protocol), about a dozen bills have been approved by committees that would add new requirements for school districts.

Some of the new requirements would be substantial, such as requiring



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seat belts in buses, with no revenue source provided. This would increase the cost and reduce the capacity of school buses, and likely require adding new personnel as bus monitors – all while the state has not paid transportation reimbursements to districts! Other proposals call for adding new instruction and courses in elementary and middle schools for civics, "work ethics," and cursive writing, which would require additional staff, space, and time.

Many other proposed mandates are on a smaller scale. These include adding to the hours of suicide awareness training needed during teacher in-service days, requiring 20 minutes of recess per day in elementary schools, and adding new financial reporting requirements to be posted on the internet. However small, they all increase the load on local public schools and usurp local control. Each one of these new requirements alone may not look like it would be a problem, but added together (like the 50 new mandates placed on public schools in the last five years) with no new funding, no days added to the school year, and no minutes added to the school day – they certainly become a huge problem.

Now is a good time for school board members and administrators to tell their legislators that the real work of the state needs to be done. Adopt a true budget. Forget about new mandates on school districts and programs for state and local governments until the fiscal health of Illinois is addressed.

Posted by [IASB Communications](#) at 11:35 AM

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