



Jim Broadway

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Illinois School News Service

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Volume 24, Number 12, February 23, 2018

Sometimes you just know the bill will pass

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

The Senate Education Committee considered one bill this week, and the outcome was never in doubt. [SB 2468](#), sponsored by [Sen. David Koehler](#) (D-Peoria) relates to current federal law requiring special education professionals to consider if a student with disabilities requires any form of "assistive technology."

Susy Woods of the [Illinois Assistive Technology Program](#) - a non-profit organization that is funded through the Illinois Department of Human Services - explained that assistive technology could be as simple as an extra-wide pencil that's easiest for a student to hold, or as complicated as speech-to-text software.

The purpose is to "help the student be successful in school" under the federal definition "FAPE" (Free Appropriate Public Education) for special education students. So consideration of "AT" is "not a new mandate," Woods said, and it can make "the difference between reading and not reading, learning and not learning."

If consideration of AT is not mandated in SB 2468, what does the bill do? It just requires that, if educators and specialists on a student's IEP team (the also already required Individualized Education Program committee) decide no AT is required, the student's *parents must be informed as to why* that was the decision.

Who could possibly oppose that bill? Well, [a witness slip "in opposition"](#) was filed on SB 2468 by a lobbyist representing the [Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education](#). She did not request to give oral testimony, but the lobbyist was asked by the [committee chairperson](#) to explain the organization's position.

It was a tough spot to be in. The lobbyist just referred to a form provided by the Illinois State Board of Education that IEP teams use as part of their reports. The form has check boxes to indicate "yes" or "no" about the need for AT, and the special education administrators group seemed to see that as sufficient.

The committee disagreed without further discussion. On [a 10-0 roll call vote](#), committee members moved the bill to the floor of the Senate for consideration. If it passes there (and it will) the bill will move to the House to repeat the process, committee consideration (and approval) and then a vote on the House floor.

Do I bring this up because the Senate addressed no other bill of interest this week? No, not *just* because of that. Again, it relates to the policy process, to factors that cause some bills to pass and other bills, seemingly logical proposals, to falter along the way. It also relates to the profoundly influential concept of "privilege."

Is everyone equal in the "eyes of the law"? They should be, of course. We're even taught that they are. But equality is just a campaign slogan; it is not reality. The fact is, some classes of citizens are just more privileged than others. Children are privileged and, as SB 2468 illustrates, special needs children are even more so.

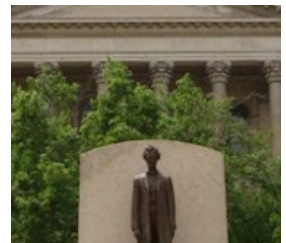
Years ago, I wrote a monograph on crisis management for a state agency. A key recommendation was to anticipate and avert problems that can get you into the most trouble. To do that, you may look at who would be hurt most by a mistake. Is it a child or a senior citizen? Both are highly privileged; you're in deep trouble.

There are many attributes that can make you privileged in America. Wealth is perhaps the most powerful. What would be the second most powerful? Being white, I believe, is that trait. White-privilege denial would be amusing if it were not so socially destructive. But research abounds [showing its prevalence](#).

Privileging traits can overlap social groups. I'm in several privileged classes, for example, in addition to being a white person. I'm also a man; the privileges are diminishing but still powerful. I'm also elderly. Next July 6, I'll be 75 years old and will be allowed through airport security areas without being patted down.

I'm also a veteran of military service, which reduces my property taxes and the costs of my funeral arrangements. I also have a stronger "voice," a journalist's sphere of influence, that reaches farther than most (thanks to you). I started ISNS the year I turned 52. Back then, folks who disagreed with me were not the least bit hesitant to say so. But now, my age and perhaps my overblown reputation knowledge seem to insulate me from criticism even when I deserve it.

There are lots of privileging traits. Tall people are privileged if they are also graceful. A reputation for truth-telling is good, too (but with other privileging traits you can be elected as President of the United States and still be seen as a liar). I may have some privileging traits that I'm not even aware of. So may you. Think about it.



Since last year's legislative sessions, a total of 231 bills have been filed that would, if enacted in their current form, alter the language of the Illinois School Code to some extent. They are [all linked to this web page](#). Now that the deadlines for filing legislation have passed, the list of bills under consideration will just shrink.

You may be pleased to know that most of them will die. If as many as 50 are passed, it would surprise me. I'll update the page every week or two. It's true that many bills amending *laws other than the School Code* are important to educators, to school districts and to schoolchildren. Pension Code legislation is an example; so are bills that would amend property tax laws. We'll report on them, but they are not on the School Code page.

As I mentioned on that web page, the key factoid is a bill's number; if you click that number (or do a simple search using the field on the left side of the [General Assembly's home page](#)), you will find links to any aspect of the bill that you can imagine. Explore the GA's web site; it truly demystifies the policy process.

For more than 20 years, ISNS subscribers have asked me about pending bills - first by fax, then by email - and I truly like to respond. I've monitored this process since 1981, so my guesses are pretty often on target. All citizens have a stake in the policy-shaping process, but none more than educators. [Need help, just ask](#).

Candidates for governor have had plenty of time to tell us their opinions on appropriate school policy. The best place to learn what they think in this regard is on their web sites. Here are some observations of candidates for the Democrat Party gubernatorial nomination in the March 20 primaries:

[Chris Kennedy's site](#) has the most comprehensive information, and the strongest statement in support of public schools, of all the candidates in either party. His statements cover funding inequities, of course, and he also notes that in many areas (especially in Cook County), under-assessments of property siphon dollars from schools.

Kennedy supports community schools, opposes closing neighborhood schools (a major issue in Chicato), supports an elected Chicago school board, proposes a moratorium on charter schools and limiting the authority of the Illinois State Charter School Commission. All-day kindergarten, more pre-school support, diversity in the "teacher pipeline," small class sizes, educating "the whole child" (social/emotional learning) - all are on his list.

[Sure, I endorsed Kennedy, but look at the sites. His is clearly the best.]

[J.B. Pritzker's site](#) focuses for its education content exclusively on early childhood education. What he has to say about that seems valid, if somewhat superficial. He has a [lot of other issues](#) to express his opinions about as well, and his thoughts on education are pretty limited as a result.

[Sen. Daniel Biss](#) wants public education to be free through college. He also opposes the "voucher" program enacted last year, driven by tax credits for the very wealthy, and believes charter schools should be held more accountable and the Chicago Public Schools board should be elected rather than appointed.

[Bob Daiber](#), an education leader, has little to say on the subject in his "issues" section; [Dr. Robert Marshall](#) has some good issue positions, but does not express himself at all on school policy; [Tio Hardiman's](#) positions are pretty unclear on any issue. Polls suggest only Pritzker, Biss or Kennedy can be nominated.

Now to the Republicans:

[The Republican candidate](#) who hopes to upset incumbent Gov. Bruce Rauner in the GOP primary on March 20 is state Rep. Jeanne Ives of Wheaton. School policy is not her issue. Her campaign against Rauner has two parts; one is to get her name known statewide in a positive way, the other is to attack Rauner vigorously.

[Rauner also has little to say](#) about school policy. He talks about "fully funding" PK-12 education without defining what he means by that - and acting as if he has actually proposed even one state budget in three years that's been enacted. His only education paragraph also stresses support for vouchers and charter schools.

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