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Fwd: Charter policy begins trial by fire this week

1 message

Jason Bauer <jbauer@panaschools.com>

Mon, Feb 11, 2019 at 8:09 AM

To: Nicole Blodgett <nblodgett@panaschools.com>

FYI

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>

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Subject: Charter policy begins trial by fire this week

To: <jbauer@panaschools.com>

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To view the web version, [click here](#).**Charter policy begins trial by fire this week**

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

If you click the "Charter Schools" link on the [ISNS bill-tracking web page](#), you'll see a list of 15 bills pending in the Illinois General Assembly that deal with charter school policy. Most of them deal with charters in ways that would have evoked a veto or two from former Gov. Bruce Rauner. But Gov. JB Pritzker may sign them into law.

Rauner, you'll recall, is a big charter school fan. He even purchased the naming rights to one of them in Chicago. Pritzker has his name on a Windy City charter too, but now he says Illinois should declare a moratorium on them. He even has called for the Illinois State Charter School Commission to be abolished.

Several of the bills would repeal the Commission's authority to overrule a local school board's decision to deny a charter school proposal. There's one that would prohibit charters in school districts that are on shaky fiscal ground. Several would tie strings to the issue of who can manage a charter school in Chicago or statewide.

And, yes, a bill to abolish the commission was filed just last week, [HB 2100](#). Of the 15 bills, seven are posted to be heard in the House PK-12 committee on [administration, licensing and charters](#). The panel is to convene at 9:30 A.m. Thursday, Valentine's Day, in Room 115 at the Capitol. (You may [monitor it at this link](#).)

Is HB 2100 posted? Not yet. It was filed just last week.

What's got so many legislators riled up about charter schools? You should know that Illinois' legislature is not alone in its apparently recent coolness to any further charter school proliferation. They figured in the recent Los Angeles teachers strike, for example, being seen as a drain on public schools' resources.

Under California law, [as EdSource reports](#), "districts are not allowed to take into account the financial impact of a charter school on a district in deciding whether or not to grant them a charter." Well, a similar provision prevents the Commission in Illinois from caring about non-charter kids when it authorizes a charter school.

Yes, current Illinois law "requires" the Commission to do what its members strongly wish to do, which is to establish a charter - even if they have to overrule a district's elected school board - if they can see it as "in the interest" of children who would attend the charter, totally ignoring the interest of the other students.

There are other reasons, complicated ones, for the policy pendulum now to be swinging against the "charter movement." Ultimately, they are being seen as a tool for privatizers to use in chipping away at public schools. Research also suggests they are not the magic wand that will improve education on the cheap, alas.

The late Rep. Mary Lou Cowlshaw, of Naperville, was for years the House GOP leader on education issues and a strong advocate for charter schools. She was also a dear friend. We talked about charters often. What makes them so great, I wanted to know. It's the fact that they are unencumbered, she told me.

Charter schools are not controlled by many of the policy mandates that tie other schools in knots. They are therefore free to be "creative," to stimulate a child's learning impulses in new and exciting ways. Then why, I asked, don't we simply let all schools be similarly free? Oh no, she declared, we couldn't do that!

The first charter school law was passed in Minnesota in 1991. Since then, that recently very cold state has allowed many other states to pass it in the [percentage of children attending charter](#) schools. Wonder why? Perhaps it relates to studies showing charters to be no better, but often no worse, than regular schools.

In Illinois, the NCES listing linked above says 3% of students attend charters. But as the most recent [ISBE listing shows](#), almost all of the charter schools in our state are in Chicago. Downstate school districts are not as receptive to the concept, which is why the [State Charter School Commission](#) was hustled into law.

It was in the winter of 2011. Illinois was chasing one of Arne Duncan's "Race to the Top" (bottom) grants, and having pro-charter policies seemed to be a condition. No, they didn't get the grant. And most of the legislators who voted to establish the Commission have tried to rein it in ever since. Maybe this year.

Will any of the pending charter law "reform" bills pass? It's a bit too early to tell. Rauner protected the Commission for the last four years, which allowed charter advocates to amass resources - that's right, *political cash* - that enabled them to fend off a tooth-pulling [override of a Rauner veto](#) late last year.

When an organization, as reported, has more than \$1.7 million to use as bait, it might be able to reel in a legislative leader or two. But that was then. Pritzker has been unambiguous in his policy statements on this issue. No more charters for now. Abolish the Commission. Address the state's fiscal problems by taxing the rich.

But for Pritzker to sign a bill that weakens the Commission, the bill must arrive at his desk. We should get a hint Thursday. It's really a question of *democracy* (elected school boards) *versus* *bureaucracy* (a group of appointees nobody knows). If all the charter bills get held in the House committee, odds are bureaucracy wins.

Nearly 20 bills are posted for that committee's hearing Thursday. It is chaired by [Rep. Sue Scherer](#) (D-Decatur), who taught in public schools for 34 years. (She was a co-sponsor of [HB 768](#) - a bill the charter advocates hated and Rauner vetoed in the 100th General Assembly. But there was no override effort in the House.)

The other House PK-12 committee, the one on [curriculum and policies](#), is scheduled to convene at 8:30 a.m. Thursday in Room 114 at the Capitol. Yes, that's just an hour before the one with the charter bills posted. (Makes it kind of difficult for anyone to monitor both House education committees. Was that intentional?)

Anyway, this committee considers bills that deal heavily with the content, as well as the processes, of PK-12 education. For example, [HB 18](#), sponsored by [Rep. Mary Flowers](#) (D-Chicago), tweaks the

current mandate for "character education" by adding a reference to respecting a person's "race or ethnicity or gender."

Of course there are some "process" bills posted. Flowers has a big one, [HB 42](#), which would require members of the Board of Education in Chicago to be elected, rather than appointed by the mayor. Her [HB 222](#) tinkers with current law on reporting suspected sexual assault or abuse of a student.

There are some far-reaching bills posted in this committee. [Rep. La Shawn Ford](#) (D-Chicago) is sponsoring [HB 191](#), which proposes to make us all safer by putting metal detectors in every doorway of every public building, including all schools. (I'm sure the metal detector lobbyists planted the idea for that one.)

What are the senators up to this week? They're staying home. Remember, when the polar vortex sent deep sub-zero winds through the state, the House fled the Capitol but the Senate stayed per schedule. This week's schedule has always called for the Senate to be inactive, and so it is.

That's good news, in a way. Friday is the deadline for filing legislation. Since the Senate is off, its members are unlikely to file as many bills as they might if they were on the Senate floor. House members will still find it convenient to clutter the place with more "good ideas," of course. They're always inclined to do that.

In any case, all the bills that can be considered in the current session will be on the public record by the end of the day Friday. Any new substantive bills will be added to the [ISNS bill-tracking page](#) categories and shell bill numbers will be added to appropriate categories as they are amended (as few will be).

The bill filing deadline cuts off the flow, but the volume of bills will be far too great still. Relief from that will come late in March - on the 22 in the Senate and the 29th in the House - when the deadlines for chamber-of- origin committee action take effect. At that point, many pending bills will go to sleep with the fishes.

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Pana Community Unit School District #8 Mail - Fwd: Charter policy begins trial by fire this week

Sent by j.m.broadway74@gmail.com in collaboration with



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