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## Fwd: Plenty of time to shape Illinois' future

1 message

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May board meeting

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From: **State School News Service** <j.m.broadway74@gmail.com>  
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## Plenty of time to shape Illinois' future

By Jim Broadway, Publisher, Illinois School News Service

Just three weeks remain in the General Assembly's spring session. There's a lot to get done before the adjournment, now scheduled for May 31. Hundreds of bills that have advanced nearly to the final stages of the policy process remain on the House and Senate calendars. They've come far but their journey is not yet over.

The FY 2020 state budget remains. That's at least 1,000 pages of appropriations bills to enact. How will the state spend about \$38 billion in the fiscal year beginning July 1? \$38 billion! That's a pile of money. Where will the state scrounge up that much in the next three weeks? Gambling? Marijuana? Gasoline taxes?

Questions abound. Will the policymakers agree on a budget? Will the schools be "fully funded" for FY 2020? How about the pension systems? Will the legislature adjourn on time? Will there be a special session? What if there's no deal by the end of May? As to important legislation still pending then, will it just die?

For the *first time in seventeen sessions* - since the last one under Gov. George Ryan - the answer is this: Calm down. The clock won't run out. There's no war going on between the second (governor) and third (legislature) floor at the Capitol. Just keep your shirt on, the situation is complex but it's well in hand.

**None of that is to minimize the challenges ahead.** What to spend, on what, and where to get the money - none of that has been enacted in law. But the leaders whose decisions matter most - Gov. JB Pritzker, Senate President John Cullerton and House Speaker Michael Madigan - seem confident they'll get the job done on time.

What signs suggest such confidence? One is the fact that the House won't be in session today. The chamber's schedule, posted last December, anticipated it would conduct session activity on May 13. [It's been cancelled](#). Look for the House also to cancel its schedule for Saturday, May 25, at least. Plenty of time.

Another sign is Pritzker's decision that there will be [no "pension holiday" this year](#). The governor had anticipated reducing pension payments as a way to close a big budget hole pending the impact of changes in revenue policy. But higher than expected tax receipts now mean such manipulation will not be needed.

A failure to fully fund pensions could have been a sticking point. Favorable resolution of that issue would suggest other major budget issues - Evidence-Based Funding for schools (a \$375 million increase) early childhood (\$100 million more in FY 2020 than this year) and other [ISBE budget lines](#) - also will be resolved favorably.

**Might benefits for wealthy taxpayers disappear** in FY 2020? It could happen. Pritzker is on record as opposing the voucher-like provision that ex-Gov. Bruce Rauner forced into the 2017 school funding reform bill by using his veto power. Scissoring that from the statutes could free up maybe \$75 million.

How about the property tax relief section, also imposed by Rauner and his Republican allies? That may be in jeopardy, not because property tax relief is not needed but because the taxpayers who need it most are *not always the ones who get it*. The language that GOP legislators forced into the EBF bill was misleading.

Sen. Jason Barickman (R-Bloomington) was the GOP leader in enacting Evidence-Based Funding. [On his web site](#), he lauds SB 1947 for creating "a mechanism to provide property tax relief to struggling families." But as senators heard last week, some of the families getting property tax relief may not be struggling so much.

Of 373 school districts that applied for property tax relief through ISBE this year, [28 received grants](#). ISBE's Robert Wolfe told senators last week that five of those districts are [among the state's wealthiest](#). Things like that usually don't happen in policy whose major thrust is to smooth over inequities that vex society.

**All viable bills to amend the School Code are still pending.** Of the few bills that have so far passed both the House and the Senate this year, none would amend the School Code. None seem of particular interest to education advocates.

The [ISBE bill-tracking page](#) was shortened again by Friday's deadlines, but the number of School Code bills still viable in the last three weeks of the session is still larger than usual. Bills to impose mandates, to address personnel matters and to bolster student safety are contributing significantly to the total.

Most of the bills pertaining only to education would, individually, be considered relatively minor policy adjustments. But in the aggregate, the entire package of bills would have wide-ranging consequences for school districts and educators. Since nothing has yet completed its journey, the direction remains to be seen.

For example, bills are pending that are intended to address the teacher shortage crisis. Some of them could be seen as measures to reduce barriers to entering the profession of education. With regard to such bills, concerns about lowering standards in teacher preparation programs have been raised.

**Getting free from the threat** of an unwanted charter school being imposed by the State Charter School Commission may be a likely outcome of the 2019 school policy process. But [an amendment](#) to SB 1226 appears largely to shift the threat's origin from the Commission back to the State Board of Education.

The amendment asserts: "The State Board may reverse a local board's decision to revoke or, beginning on July 1, 2020, not renew a charter if the State Board finds that the charter school or charter school proposal (i) is in compliance with this Article and (ii) is in the best interests of the students it is designed to serve."

The key words are "interests of the students it is designed to serve." Just like current law, the language of the pending bill now explicitly excludes consideration of the interests of students *who attend other schools in a district*, schools that may lose resources when they are diverted to support the charter school.

The amendment subjects decisions of a local school board and also of the State Board to judicial review. Rep. Emanuel Chris Welch, sponsor of the last amendment, has said the final bill will reflect input from numerous stakeholders - which means no one will be very happy with it. He'll surely be right about that.

**What bills are sensitive to the adjournment deadline?** Many bills involve complex issues with a lot of moving parts. As a general thing, most will not need to be slapped together by May 31, even though that is the deadline for adjournment. They can be worked on over the summer and resolved in the fall "veto session."

Issues that are crucial to the state's budget for FY 2020, however, should be resolved by the deadline - or at least by the July 1 start of the new fiscal year. The spending plan is the key package in that regard, of course, but so are measures that would affect the amount of revenue available to be spent.

Now that a "pension holiday" is off the table, the fiscal constraints are a bit tighter. Extensive discussions of gambling expansion - especially "sports betting" - brought all the players (race track, casino and video gaming interests) together last week, but no workable proposal seemed likely to emerge soon.

Similarly, legalizing recreational marijuana is likely to happen, but shaping such policy change likely will take too long for the revenue to be counted toward FY 2020. Some revenue streams surely will have to be developed over the summer and enacted in the fall, at the earliest, and thus may support just half of FY 2020.

**This issue opened with observations about time.** Properly or not, time measurement is defined in public policy. Perhaps the most contentious time-related laws regulate daylight saving time. It's [been around for a century now](#), but it seems to be unraveling. Example, Florida is now DST-only, even has its own time zone.

A University of Oregon professor has documented how shifting time's status during the year [can be hazardous](#) to citizens' health and safety. People get sick. People die. And, contrary to popular belief, DST is of *no benefit to farmers*. No wonder a recent question on "Last Week Tonight" was: [How is this still a thing?](#)

If some [students at Carlinville High School](#) get their wish, time changes during the year won't be a thing for long. Time will stop at what is now measured as DST - and it *will just stay there*. Aside from lacking benefits and being hazardous, shifting time back and forth during the year is very annoying, the students decided.

They reached out to their state senator, [Sen. Andy Manar](#) (D-Bunker Hill), a policy process achiever. He picked up [SB 553](#) and wrote a DST-only amendment that has attracted bipartisan support. The bill was assigned to committee last week. Will it pass? That is unlikely, in my view. Time's running out.

**The last two weeks have been very busy** at the Capitol, but I have not been very communicative. I must apologize for that. The fact is, I've been at the clinic pretty often, doing my best to recover from a persistent respiratory ailment. It still hangs on, but I'm now greatly improved. Stay healthy out there.

**These special ISNS features** will be updated regularly: the [bill-tracking web page](#) showing the status of viable bills that could affect education policy, and a page of links to all [ISNS newsletters so far delivered](#) in 2019. (The URL for these pages was **changed for May 13**, so only ISNS readers can readily access them.)

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