



ADVOCACY IN ACTION

# Capitol Watch

**IASA**  
ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS



## **This Week Under the Dome: Deadlines, Debates & Da Bears**

Hello and Happy Friday!

As we move deeper into session, activity in Springfield has been uncharacteristically light. Considering we are already at the end of February, it is surprising that very few proposals have started moving yet. Committee action did pick up this week, though it still was not a full-throttle offense. The tempo is likely to accelerate soon with the Senate committee deadline rapidly approaching on March 13. The next few weeks could be extremely busy in the Senate as lawmakers work to move their bills before time runs out. Meanwhile, the House is heading to the sidelines for two weeks, so we will not see additional action from that chamber until mid-March.

The biggest storyline around the Capitol this week has been whether or not the General Assembly will pass a bill that provides an incentive for the Chicago Bears to remain in Illinois when they build their new stadium. The first legislative step toward keeping them in the state was taken Thursday in the House Revenue Committee, where a two-hour hearing resulted in the partisan advancement of the proposal to the House floor. For those of you who root for the Bears, there is at least some early momentum, but as we all know, there's plenty of game left to play in Springfield. (Further explanation of the bill contents can be found below).

Below you will find information on opportunities for direct advocacy with your legislators, along with a breakdown of key bills that saw committee action this week.

### **Advocacy Opportunities**

#### Driving Success Campaign

The Governor's budget proposal last week was just that - a proposal. It marks the beginning of the process, not the final product. With several months of negotiations ahead, there is significant time to engage legislators and reinforce the importance of fully funding mandated categorical programs while continuing the state's commitment to equity through the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula.

While the Governor's recommendation to increase mandated categorical program funding by \$50 million is a positive step, ISBE estimates that an additional \$151 million over FY26 appropriations is needed to maintain this year's proration percentages into FY27. Without that investment, districts will continue to absorb the impact of underfunded mandates in their local budgets. Engagement with legislators will be critical over the next three months to ensure they understand the importance of directing as much funding as possible to these services.

We encourage you to review the advocacy resources available on the [IASA](#) website. There is a brief, 10-minute tutorial that walks you through how to complete a customizable one-pager using

your district's data to clearly demonstrate how proration and inadequate funding affect your students and your financial stability.

***Please consider reaching out to your legislators to discuss this critical issue and share your district's story!***

#### Removing Barriers to Solar Projects

School districts are increasingly interested in installing solar panels on their campuses due to the availability of renewable energy credits and the probability of saving up to 20-30% on energy costs. [SB 3273](#) (Cunningham; D-Chicago) would remove barriers that school districts are currently experiencing, including improving interconnection timeline response, ensuring no surprise fees are included in the project, requiring timely distribution of net metering credits, and standardizing interconnection fees. The bill is supported by IASA, IASBO and IASB, and a fact sheet on the proposal can be viewed [here](#).

***Please consider contacting your Senator to ask for their support!***

#### **Important Committee Action This Week**

##### Senate Education

[SB 2909](#) (Belt; D-East St. Louis) is an initiative of the Illinois Education Association (IEA) and would prohibit evaluators from using artificial intelligence tools to assign numerical scores or qualitative ratings in teacher evaluations or for any task requiring professional judgment, though AI may be used for administrative support. Likewise, teachers may not use AI to generate evidence of professional practice for evaluation purposes, but may use it for administrative tasks. Further, the proposal would require the local joint committee to establish guidance on permissible AI use in the evaluation process, and any use of AI by either the evaluator or teacher must be disclosed, including the name of the tool and its specific purpose.

[SB 2953](#) (Halpin; D-Rock Island) would extend, through June 30, 2029, the provision allowing retired teachers to return to work without impacting their pension status for up to 120 paid days or 600 paid hours per school year. Without this extension, the allowable limit would revert to 100 days or 500 hours, annually, on June 30, 2026.

##### House Elementary & Secondary Education: Administration, Licensing and Charter Schools

[HB 4375](#) (Hoffman; D-Belleville) is an association initiative that would extend the interfund transfer allowance for one-time, non-recurring expenses, or to the fund in most need through June of 2029. This flexibility is currently scheduled to sunset in June of 2026. School districts have the permanent authority to transfer funds among the big three operating funds, but this additional allowance for flexibility with all other funds can be useful for unanticipated financial pressures.

[HB 4535](#) (Hirschauer; D-West Chicago) would allow a school district to use an e-learning day on an election day when a school in the district was selected as a polling place. This would allow an additional e-learning day for this purpose, outside of the five that are available for use as emergency days.

## House Revenue

[HB 1818](#) (Tarver; D-Chicago) would require downward assessment adjustments for all similarly situated commercial properties when one property is found to be under-assessed. Opponents, including the Cook County Assessor's Office, warn the bill could open a "Pandora's box," accelerating commercial-to-residential tax shifts, increasing the likelihood of property tax hikes, and creating financial instability for school districts that may be required to issue refunds without guaranteed recapture under PTELL. The bill also alters the tax objection process by striking language that clearly places the burden of proof on plaintiffs, creating uncertainty around litigation standards and potentially increasing both the time and cost of appeals for taxing bodies. Proponents argue the measure promotes fairness and transparency, and the sponsor indicated continued conversations with stakeholders would be welcome. The bill passed committee 20-0.

[HB 910](#) (Buckner; D-Chicago) was the headline issue at the Capitol this week, drawing significant attention ahead of Thursday morning's two-hour hearing. The proposal creates a "megaproject" framework that allows a municipality and a company to negotiate a long-term incentive agreement, with all affected taxing bodies brought to the table. To qualify, a project must include at least a \$500 million investment (or \$250 million with at least 50 new jobs created, or \$100 million with at least 100 new jobs created). Under the bill, the property's assessment would be frozen at a base-year value, and an incentive agreement would require approval following a public hearing by a local review board that includes the impacted taxing bodies. Importantly, the vote would be weighted according to each body's share of the property taxes in the area, which is a structure that provides school districts with a more direct voice than the traditional TIF process. While it is widely understood that this proposal was introduced with the Chicago Bears stadium project in mind, the framework would apply to any qualifying megaproject seeking development elsewhere in the state.

## House Personnel & Pensions

[HB 2564](#) (Vella; D-Loves Park) provides for some exemptions to the 6% salary cap imposed on teacher salaries in their final years of service that can result in districts having to pay steep penalties to the Teachers' Retirement System. Specifically, the proposal would exempt overload assignments, including summer school instruction, from counting towards the 6% cap. This change could help districts avoid unnecessary penalties, while allowing teachers to take on extra work in their final years.

Thank you for staying up to date and in the game at the Capitol!

Sincerely,  
Emily Warnecke  
Chief of Staff