Bills to Watch

February 20, 2020 Update

Since the last day of the regular session last year, there have been a whopping 3,599 bills filed in the Illinois legislature! Only a small proportion of them will ever become laws. Looking at the bills today, it’s impossible to tell which ones will make it to the finish line. But some clear themes are emerging among the education bills, such as teacher licensure, school safety and discipline, college and career readiness, school district consolidation and governance, and property tax relief. We will walk through those topics and their related bills over the next few weeks.

We are especially excited that our initiative to accelerate school funding equity has been filed as Senate Bill 3793 and House Bill 4948, sponsored by Senator Andy Manar and Representative Will Davis, the education champions who overhauled the school funding formula three years ago.

Click here to view a list of the education bills that we are keeping an eye on this year so far. You can look up the full text and bill status of any of these bills by visiting ilga.gov. In the column on the left-hand side of the screen, enter the bill number you’re interested to learn more about. (For a Senate Bill, you’ll type “SB” followed by the bill number. For a House Bill, you’ll type “HB” followed by the bill number.) This list of bills will be updated approximately weekly.

The bill filing deadline was last Friday, so in theory every policy bill that will be considered this year has already be filed. However, many of these bills will have amendments filed that will modify or even completely change their content. When bills are first filed, they go to a committee called “Rules” in the House and “Assignments” in the Senate. Then, some are assigned to a substantive committee, like the Senate’s “Education” or the House’s “Elementary & Secondary Education: Curriculum and Policy.” (But plenty will remain in Rules/Assignments.) Those committees meet weekly for the next couple of months to consider the bills that come before them. The committee members will vote favorably on some of these bills so that they can be considered “on the floor” (that is, they can be voted on by the whole House or Senate). (But again, some bills will remain in committee and never have a full vote on the floor.) Finally, bills will receive a floor vote. Those that pass will move to the opposite chamber and repeat the whole process. (In other words, Senate Bills that pass the Senate will go to the House Rules committee, then to a substantive House committee, and then have a House floor vote.) For more – or at least more entertaining – information, see this Schoolhouse Rock classic.

December 5, 2019 Update

Veto session is now squarely behind us and legislators are back in their districts. (Remember that “veto session” is the time that the Illinois legislature convenes for two weeks in the fall to consider bills that the governor vetoed and other pressing issues that have arisen since the regular session adjourned in May.) Unless something extraordinary happens, they will not come together again at the Capitol until January.

As for the substantive updates, veto session saw a few small clean-up bills related to education, some bigger non-education bills (like pension investment consolidation and a cap on the price of insulin), and a lot of discussion about other things that didn’t come together (like a ban on ethylene oxide and casino tax structures). As for education, a few bills passed both chambers and are on their way to the Governor for his signature.
• Senate Bill 10 focuses on helping address the teacher shortage crisis and greater due process for special needs students. Its chief sponsors are Senator Andy Manar (D) and Representative Fred Crespo (D). SB10 corrects an issue that arose after the legislature eliminated the requirement that teacher candidates take the Basic Skills test. Eliminating the test removed one pathway for paraprofessionals, those individuals who are in a career already but who want to become teachers, to earn their teaching licensure. Adding a paraprofessional competency test restores an option for teacher aides to get certified. Another amendment to the bill could grant Chicago Public School parents additional time to request a hearing for special education for their child.

• Senate Bill 460 supports parent engagement of students with IEPs (individualized education plans). Its chief sponsors are Senator Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant (D) and Representative Crespo. Over the summer, a bill became law that made lots of changes to Special Education laws in CPS. Some of those changes were: requiring the district to publish on its website proposed changes to Special Education policy and allow virtual public comments before the board votes on the changes; translating Special Education guidance documents into Spanish and, upon request, into other languages; sending parents copies of all written materials three days before an IEP review meeting; allowing parents to view service logs recording the type of IEP services and minutes administered; and having the school notify parents in writing if services required under a student’s IEP were not provided. Oftentimes, after a complex bill becomes law, small changes are identified that need to be tweaked to implement it well. A bill that makes these changes is sometimes called a “trailer bill.” Senate Bill 460 is a trailer bill that makes a couple of small changes, specifically allowing more time to phase in the requirement that schools provide written copies of IEP materials.

• House Bill 744 helps make college more affordable. Its chief sponsors are Representative Katie Stuart (D) and Senator Pat McGuire (D). HB744 makes technical changes that are needed for implementation of the AIM HIGH program, which will provide college affordability grants to Illinois students attending public universities.

Separately, the spring legislative session calendar was recently released. This notes the days from January through May the legislature is expected to be in session. You can see the calendar here.

And finally, one thing that caught a lot of folks off guard is that Senate President John Cullerton announced his retirement. He will be leaving in January. Sen. Cullerton was instrumental to the passage of school funding reform. He empowered members of his caucus to keep pushing this, despite the political risks, and he made the issue a top priority for years when others were content to ignore it. Senators will gather for a special session on January 19, 2020 to elect the chamber’s next president.

November 11, 2019 Update

The Illinois Senate and House of Representatives are in the middle of their two-week annual “veto session,” the time when they usually might attempt to override the veto of a bill. Barring the unexpected, they will adjourn this week for the remainder of the year.

Despite having the word “veto” in its name, this session hasn’t devoted much time to them. Because Governor Pritzker only vetoed eight of nearly 600 bills, Springfield has focused on new bills such as those banning ethylene oxide, capping insulin costs, and prohibiting sales of flavored cigarettes and vaping
pods. This week, they’re expected to also take up ethics legislation and matters related to Chicago’s budget.

In addition to these important issues, there are some education bills worth following.

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