



ED-RED



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Schools, Parents, Advocates Urge Gov. Rauner to Stand with Legislature to Stop Treating Poor Schools Like Piggy Banks

CHICAGO – Today, school administrators, parents, and education advocates praised the final, unanimous Senate passage of HB656, which also passed unanimously in the House earlier this year. The groups urged Governor Bruce Rauner to stand with education supporters across the state and in the General Assembly and quickly sign the bill into law. HB656 invests more federal funds in helping our most vulnerable students learn by lowering the egregiously high rate of federal funds districts must now divert to pay pension debt.

“The legislature has spoken loud and clear, standing shoulder to shoulder for a common sense, bipartisan bill that puts more money into classrooms of our most vulnerable students. This will benefit schools in Illinois outside of Chicago, both rural and urban and everything in between. Now the Governor has the opportunity to sign this bill into law, fix this unconscionable practice, and more effectively invest education funding to drive student outcomes,” said Mimi Rodman, Executive Director of Stand for Children Illinois.

"Representative Jehan Gordon-Booth and Senators Steve Stadelman and Linda Holmes showed true leadership by shepherding this bill through the General Assembly. With wide bipartisan support, we are now closer than ever to fixing this issue and improving the education of many Illinois students. In a state that's last in the nation for school funding disparities, our neediest schools can't afford this additional hit," said Ginger Ostro, Executive Director of Advance Illinois.

The Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) surcharge is the special rate school districts outside of Chicago must pay when using federal funds to pay teachers (Chicago pays its own pension costs so this law doesn't factor in for them.). Those federal funds are meant to support underserved students, but when a district spends those funds to hire certified teachers, the State takes 39% of those funds to pay off the pension debt of the TRS. Next fiscal year, that percentage will climb to an eye-popping 45%.

"In my district, nearly \$2 million in federal funds meant to help our Title I students goes to pay the state's pension debt instead. That is funding that could be used to hire 20 teachers or reading specialists. We could double the enrollment of our summer enrichment program for struggling students. Instead, we are throwing the money away to pay debt that we didn't create," said Dr. Ehren Jarrett, Superintendent of Rockford Public Schools.

Illinois is the only state in the country to have adopted this practice. Federal funds are a lifeline for needier students and schools that are under-resourced. But the state instead treats them like a piggy bank to break open to cover its massive pension debt.

Federal funds are supposed to be targeted to serve poor and special needs students. When school districts in Illinois hire teachers using state or local funds, they pay only 0.58% of salaries to TRS. But when districts pay teachers using federal funds, they pay over 65 times that amount to TRS. As a result, the high TRS payment for federally funded positions hits the state's poorest districts hardest. School districts face two terrible choices: relinquish to the pension fund 39 cents of every dollar (soon to be 45 cents) of every federal dollar they receive, or spend federal funds on materials, which may not make the most impact on student learning. Districts should be making their spending decisions in the best interests of students, not sacrificing a third of their federal funds that are intended to help our most underserved children.

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About Stand for Children Illinois:

Stand for Children is a non-partisan education advocacy organization focused on ensuring all students graduate from high school ready for college or career training. Visit www.stand.org/illinois for more information.

About ED-RED:

ED-RED, “the voice of suburban schools”, is an advocacy organization serving public school districts, special education cooperatives, and Intermediate Service Centers in suburban Cook, Lake and DuPage counties. For more than forty years, we have worked to educate our member districts about the legislative and political landscape to ensure school leaders can advocate for their students and community priorities. We also seek to provide quality information on the impacts of legislative and fiscal decisions on public school operations and student achievement to the General Assembly, the Illinois State Board of Education, and the Administration.

About LEND:

The mission of LEND is to identify, inform, and influence legislation and regulations that impact students and school communities of DuPage County.

About Advance Illinois:

Advance Illinois is an independent, objective voice for a healthy public education system that prepares all students in Illinois are ready for college, career and civic life. Advance Illinois is equity-driven, student-centered and data-focused and positioned uniquely to provide the continuity required to successfully pass, implement, and evaluate policy change. Advance Illinois identifies, designs and advocates for policies that are grounded in nationally recognized best practices and then tailored to the needs of students in Illinois.

About INCS:

The Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) advocates for the improvement of public education by leveraging the charter school model as a catalyst to transform lives and communities. INCS works to ensure that charter public schools have adequate and equitable resources, the autonomy to find innovative approaches to meet student needs, and a fair and transparent policy landscape that allows high-quality options to thrive. As the voice of Illinois charter schools, INCS engages a diverse coalition of policymakers, school leaders, parents, and community members to create systemic change and secure high-quality schools for undeserved communities. For more information, visit www.incschools.org.

About LUDA:

LUDA (The Large Unit District Association) was created in 1976 by a group of superintendents who recognized the need for an organization that would provide networking, professional development, and advocacy for large unit school districts.

About Rockford Public Schools:

Rockford Public Schools focuses on college and career readiness for its more than 28,500 students. It is among the largest school districts in Illinois and the second-largest employer in the Rockford region, with approximately 4,700 full and part-time employees. RPS 205 strives to be the first choice for all families.

About SCOPE:

The mission of SCOPE is to provide leadership and organization to coordinate support from the legislature so that children in the south and southwest suburban area will be educated to meet the challenges of the future.

About High School District Organization of Illinois:

The HSDO was established during the 2001-02 school year in response to the change in the funding formula that reduced the weighted factor given to high school districts. While that legislation and other funding issues relative to high schools remain as a central focus of the organization, other legislative initiatives of particular interest to high school districts have also been addressed through direct testimony, written testimony, and proposed legislation.

About Teach Plus:

Teach Plus empowers excellent, experienced teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Teach Plus programs are designed to place highly effective teachers at the center of improvements in schools as leaders of their peers and outside schools influencing policy decisions that affect their classrooms. Since its inception in August 2007, Teach Plus has grown to a network of more than 23,000 solutions-oriented teachers across the country. www.teachplus.org