

LWVIL Issues Briefing 2016: Schools and School Funding

Claire McIntyre and Jean Pierce, Issues Specialists

Because the state was unable to meet its General State Aid obligations in 2015, schools received only 92% of the amount they had been promised in the budget, and the per pupil rate was \$2780 below the Educational Foundation Advisory Board recommended level. The cumulative loss of education funding during the period FY2010 through FY2016 as compared to FY2009 amounted to approximately \$3.8 billion, with General State Aid, meant to equalize education funding, losing hundreds of millions of dollars. The funding gap continues to widen between the districts that have adequate local resources and the districts that have not.

Districts have been forced to dip into whatever reserve funds they had, and 2/3rds are now in deficit spending. While emergency funding was allocated so that schools could open in September, there are still large questions about how much funding will be available and how long schools will need to wait to receive it in 2016.

Actions regarding Education since the 2015 Issues Briefing:

- In March, an updated Charter School position was approved. It can be found at <http://www.lwvil.org/updated-charter-schools-position.html>
- April, 2015: TFA supporting HB397 stopping the Charter School Commission from overriding decisions of local school boards. Passed the House, stuck in committee in the Senate.
- March & May, 2015: Witness slip and TFA supporting HB 1360 to require charters to meet the same non-curricular health and safety standards as traditional public schools.
- April & May, 2015: Witness slips, letter to the governor, and TFA supporting HB4025, requiring civic education in high school.
- In order to achieve adequate school funding, the following fiscal policy actions were taken:
 - May, 2015 TFA urging increased revenue
 - Fall, 2015 TFA, video, Letters to editors, etc. regarding the need to resolve the budget impasse
- February, 2016:
 - TFA opposing using the ISBE plan to use special education funding to obtain educational equity
 - Letter to Representative Mayfield opposing HB 4424: mandatory retention for third graders not reading at grade level at the end of the year
 - Witness Slip and written testimony opposing HB4263 which would cap property tax
 - Letters to the Governor and ISBE opposing accepting a grant to create 40 new charter schools because of the financial impact on traditional public schools
 - Letters to Senator Cullerton and Rep. Flynn-Currie opposing capping property taxes

Anticipated Issues in 2016:

Education Funding is seriously inadequate and inequitable in the state. Therefore, the League will continue to:

- Monitor legislation to determine whether equitable funding is tied to additional revenue. This legislation must not 1) create “winners and losers” or 2) transfer money from current line items.
- Monitor legislation inspired by Vision 20/20, including the recommendation that adequate funding must be tied to evidence-based practices

- Fight against calls for lowering property taxes, which are the principal source of support for public schools.
- Argue for additional revenue, a fair budget, and a graduated rate income tax.

In addition, with charter school sympathizers leading the Illinois State Board of Education, we anticipate a need to remain vigilant that funding decisions do not discriminate against traditional public schools.