

## **LWVIL 2017 Issues Briefing: Education Funding**

Claire McIntyre and Jean Pierce, Issue Specialists

Once again evidence based on data from ISBE has documented the connection between poverty and school achievement in Illinois. Meanwhile, the number of concentrated high-poverty schools in Illinois -- where nearly every child is considered low-income -- swelled, from 421 schools in 2004 to 649 in 2014. The Daily Herald/WBEZ analysis shows that 17 percent of all public school students in the state now attend schools where 90-100 percent of students are low-income.

### **Legislative Activity:**

July, 2016: Illinois schools were budgeted for a full year of funding. An additional \$361 M was added to General State Aid allowing:

- Public schools to receive their funding level from FY 16 but will also receive additional dollars dependent on student need. There was no indication as to whether it will be pro-rated as in the past.
- IL to spend an additional \$80 M on early childhood education
- Districts servicing a high concentration of low-income students to receive a share of a \$250 M poverty grant, with \$102.5 M going to CPS

58.6% of school districts are in deficit spending – the highest percentage since 2010. And yet, school districts' financial ratings appear to be improving, with fewer districts on financial watch and more in the highest category. Apparently this is due to borrowing against future tax collections. This practice would seem to be particularly risky in view of the constantly-looming possibility of property tax caps.

### **League Activity:**

- Feb., 2016:
  - TFA opposing the plan to use special education funds to equalize educational funding – the plan was dropped
  - Letter to Representative Mayfield opposing HB4424 – mandatory retention for third graders not reading at grade level by the end of the year. The bill did not advance
  - Witness slip with written testimony plus letters to Senator Cullerton and Rep. Flynn-Currie opposing HB4263, property tax cap. It did not get out of committee
  - Letters to Governor and to ISBE opposing using federal grant funds to open 48 additional charter schools. The funds were accepted for that purpose.
  - TFA supporting including educators on the ISBE Board. The bill did not advance.
- Apr., 2016:
  - TFA opposing increasing the length of time for charter school renewals from 5-10 years. The bill was signed into law.
  - TFA supporting a Constitutional Amendment for a graduated rate income tax. The bill did not pass.
- May, 2016:
  - TFA opposing a freeze on property taxes. The bill did not advance.
  - Witness slip supporting preventing Charter School Commission from overriding district decision. The bill did not advance.
- June, 2016: TFA supporting passing a fully-funded state budget by June 30. Instead, a 6-month stop-gap budget was passed.
- January, 2017: Signed on to Raise Your Hand letter opposing voucher schools.

**Outlook:****1) Inequitable funding of education**

- a. Education Funding is seriously inadequate and inequitable in the state. Having a federal Department of Education held the promise of compelling states to fund schools equitably. But it appears that the DOE will be disbanded.
- b. Two bills will include a new approach to addressing the problem – through Evidence-Based funding, which would cost approximately \$6 B more (less than 1% of the Illinois economy).
  - i. Per pupil investment would be determined by identifying how much it costs to implement best practices that have statistically meaningful correlation to enhanced achievement
  - ii. Adjusting for demography of each school's student population
  - iii. Covering social/emotional/wraparound services
- c. As in the past, we will continue to
  - i. 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.
  - ii. Monitor legislation inspired by Vision 20/20, including the recommendation that adequate funding must be tied to evidence-based practices
  - iii. Fight against calls for lowering property taxes, which are the principal source of support for public schools.
  - iv. Argue for additional revenue, a fair budget, and a graduated rate income tax.

**2) Loss of school revenue from other sources:**

- a. Appropriating federal funding to pay down pension debt: SB 436 would protect districts from having their federal dollars (intended to support low income or special needs students) 'skimmed' to help pay down the pension debt.
- b. Loss of CPPRT dollars due to the ongoing budget crisis.

**3) Higher Education Funding: LWVIL needs to adopt a position statement on higher education funding****4) Charter School funding: With charter school sympathizers leading the Illinois State Board of Education as well as the state and federal government, we anticipate a need to remain vigilant that funding decisions do not discriminate against traditional public schools.**