



Auburn Community Unit District No. 10



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From the Desk of the Superintendent

On Thursday August 31, Governor Rauner signed into law House Bill 1947.

When the Illinois Legislators passed a budget in late June, the school funding portion required schools be funded on an evidence-based funding model rather than the formula which has been in place for decades. The problem was that no evidence-based model had been agreed upon by legislation. Without a funding mechanism in place to fund public education, no payments have been made to schools during the month of August. House Bill 1947, which established a new evidence-based funding formula, was quickly approved on Thursday August 31.

As a result, we witnessed a swell of handshakes and celebration. What exactly are we celebrating? Is it a feeling of relief that the Illinois legislators passed something, much like the relief one feels after passing a kidney stone? Or will this historic change finally bring adequacy and equity to how public schools are funded?

The actual mathematical formula for what evidence-based means is to be explained to school administrators later next week, however; there is a universal feeling that an evidence-based model is more equitable across the state and will eventually become a much better way to fund our schools.

What we do know is that this funding model was sold to us with a “hold harmless” provision. Hold harmless is a deceptive term. It is not necessarily “harmless”. It means that no school district will receive less money than what they were entitled to in the prior school year. It has been nearly a decade now that the State of Illinois has simply not paid their legal obligation to school districts in the form of absent payments, late payments, prorated payments and payments based on an outdated foundation level. It is no different than if your employer only paid you a portion of your paycheck last year, but promised that next year you would be paid at least the same shortened amount as you were paid last year. This transitional starting point is called the Base Funding Minimum. Unlike other proposals, it promises to create no big losers going forward.

In HB 1947 there is a Tax Credit provision. That sounds great! What is it? A maximum of \$75 million of our tax revenue can go to private schools. Rather than calling this a “private school voucher” which holds a politically negative connotation, we now call them tax credits and scholarships. Regardless if you like private schools or not isn’t the point. These types of programs take public tax dollars away from

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public education and erode the very premise on which a free education for everyone was based upon. A private school is called private because it is private. Private schools are not held to the same high accountability standards as public schools are because they were not intended to be funded with our tax dollars. Furthermore, there is no data or any evidence that suggests that supporting private schools with public money increases student performance. It only guarantees that there is less money for public schools.

HB 1947 puts together a task force to study the impact Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) has on school funding. TIFs take money intended for public schools and give it to municipalities for private development and infrastructure. TIFs also put public tax money into private pockets.

Another piece of this legislation is labeled "mandate relief". It allows schools to have only 3 days of physical education rather than the required 5 days for students in grades 7 through 12 who participate in sports. It's only mandate relief if it saves the school district money. So, for those students who qualify, where do they go two days a week? Schools across the state have been cutting electives for the past decade because of the Illinois' inability to pay their financial obligations. PE is the only place left within a small school district's schedule for students to go. For most schools in our area, it's not true mandate relief.

If the only true goal was to fund public education, this issue would not be so debated and so complicated. It is not clear whether the new funding formula and all of its political appendages has the ability to deliver the financial CPR to public schools that it promises or if this is a new era in destroying our public schools.

Darren J. Root, Ed.S., CSBO
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