



Illinois State Board of Education

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Jesse H. Ruiz
Chairman

Rod Blagojevich
Governor

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

January 14, 2009

Dear Member of the General Assembly:

RE: Education Funding

Like you and all of your colleagues, the Illinois State Board of Education is committed to the success of our students. To this end, the Board and the State Superintendent of Education serve as advocates for our students with you and your counterparts at the federal level.

One of the most important assignments the Board has is to advocate for funding for our students. We are currently preparing an Elementary and Secondary Education budget request for your review for Fiscal Year 2010. We are grateful for the support that you have provided education in the past and understand the financial realities our state currently faces.

While I have noted our Board's and my focus on the FY10 budget, the purpose of this letter is to discuss the financial situation in this current fiscal year (FY09) and to urge you to do whatever possible to maintain the financial commitment that has been made to Illinois students. Illinois schools recognize that the state currently has more bills than cash on hand. Indeed, despite the issuance of \$1.4 billion in bonds in December 2008 to help pay down the backlog of bills, the Comptroller's office still had more than 9,000 vouchers for Illinois schools totaling more than \$550 million.

General State Aid claims are still being paid on time, a fact that school districts in Illinois greatly appreciate; but many of the other grant funds upon which school districts rely for daily operations are lagging two, three or more months behind. For example, participants in the state's nationally recognized early childhood education program have withdrawn due to the delays in funding (given that payroll and other costs simply cannot be met).

Yet, while these delays in payments may be causing great financial strain on school districts, the actual reduction of the FY09 dollars that had been promised—a scenario which I and others continue to hear as a possibility—would be a far harsher blow. School districts have built their respective budgets around the FY09 budget enacted by the General Assembly—local labor agreements have been put into place, and leases and other contracts have been signed.

Moreover, a reduction to the amount of state funding flowing to our schools places corresponding federal funds at risk. Under federal requirements for maintenance of effort funding, states must demonstrate spending on special education and other programs that is no lower than the spending the preceding year in order to continue receiving such federal matching funds. Other programs with similar maintenance of effort requirements include Free Lunch/Breakfast, Early Childhood and Summer Bridges.

Again, while we and the rest of the Illinois education community understand and do not seek to minimize the unfortunate financial realities facing the state, I urge you not to reduce any lines in the FY09 education budget. I appreciate and thank you for your support of education and should you have additional questions, please call me at 217/785-1288.

Sincerely,

Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education