



GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE OF ILLINOIS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 8, 2017

Dr. Elizabeth Purvis
James R. Thompson Center
100 W. Randolph, 16-100
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Dr. Purvis:

First, we'd like to thank you and your staff for your effort and dedication to the work of the Illinois School Funding Reform Commission. The commission brought a diverse group of members together for the common goal of improving educational opportunities for all Illinois' students through funding reform. The final report of the commission represents many points of consensus which can be used as a guide for an ultimately successful funding reform bill. However, we find it very important that we identify our outstanding concerns with the finalized report:

- The report does not properly recognize that Illinois' current school funding system is broken, in large part, because of overreliance on property taxes. Property tax dollars account for 67% of all education spending, while the nationwide average is 45%. This creates inequity, because too often there are not enough state resources to support the districts with inadequate local wealth. Unless a truly massive infusion of state resources can be provided to our schools, Illinois will continue to be regressive compared to states with less property tax reliance. Perhaps the current discussion surrounding a property tax freeze would help the situation while providing the benefit of relieving the property tax burden for local constituents, but ultimately we must acknowledge that an influx of state education dollars is necessary to increase equity, approach adequacy, and avoid classroom cuts.
- Appendix II of the report provides the entirety of the 27 adequacy elements proposed in the Evidence-Based Model. Commission members did not explicitly endorse the Evidence-Based Model or these 27 elements. At this time, there remains a lack of general understanding regarding the elements and how removing, adding, or changing elements would impact school districts.
- The report suggests the group found consensus on the notion that district-authorized charter schools should receive funding that is equitable to district-managed public schools. While all commissioners believe adequate charter school funding is important, the term "equitable" can be misleading. There are situations where a school district will offer services, use of buildings, and other benefits to its charters.

As such, districts should retain the flexibility to provide funding that is commensurate with such services. A strict interpretation of “equitable” funding removes this flexibility.

- The report placed a significant negative emphasis on the Chicago Block Grants without a commensurate discussion of the pension inequities facing the district. Chicago taxpayers continue to help fund the downstate teachers’ pension system payment, over \$4.5 billion for FY 18, while receiving only \$12 million in state funding for Chicago teachers’ pensions. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is the single largest district in the state, representing 19% of all Illinois’ students. If the commission’s work is truly an attempt to find a statewide solution to our school funding issues, then we must consider revising policies that impact CPS both positively and negatively.
- While the report accurately reflects the commission’s acknowledgement of the additional funding needs for students living in concentrated poverty, we feel this point is of vital importance. The report does mention some possible strategies to ensure additional funding for this population, but without further study, it is unclear whether or not such strategies will sufficiently address the issue.
- Appendix III of the report provides specific details regarding membership, duties, and timeframes for the “Commission for Oversight and Implementation of the School Funding Formula.” While many commissioners are comfortable with these details, there are outstanding concerns that it will exclude experts who have spent their entire professional lives working towards the common goal of funding reform. The report’s identification of the specific commission membership, duties, and timeframes seems to be unnecessarily limiting.

We thank you very much for your consideration of these concerns. Additionally, we request that this letter be posted to the Commission’s website, so our concerns will be publicly available. We look forward to continued work toward our common goal of school funding reform for the benefit of all of Illinois’ students.

Sincerely,



Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie



Rep. William Davis



Rep. Rita Mayfield



Rep. Emily McAsey