



Legislative Written Testimony

Amendment #2, HB 2170/SB 458

The Illinois Association of School Boards appreciates the concepts of this amendment in its attempts to address the educational needs of our most at-risk students. We do have some concerns about the implementation of some of the programmatic provisions, and especially of the fiscal challenges it could present to local school districts. School board members from across the state have laid out clear positions in our opposition to unfunded mandates that fall upon local districts. We commit to working with the sponsors and supporters of this legislation in finding solutions to these concerns so a viable, properly funded law can be enacted.

We also recognize that several changes have been made to ease the burden on local school districts. We appreciate the responsiveness of the sponsors of this legislation to the concerns of stakeholders.

We understand that the intent is for funding to be made available through the funding formula to cover the costs of these new requirements. We support that effort but need to assure that such funding is available and is delivered to the districts. Funding for all new requirements should be made part of the criteria in the evidence-based funding formula. For example: adding new high school graduation requirements in foreign languages; requiring new courses to be offered regarding entry into our state universities; and requiring on-going professional development for staff; will all add costs to school districts for materials, teachers, and classroom space.

Given the tight fiscal restraints the state is under, funding for all of these provisions could be challenging.

It must be made clear throughout the legislation that if full, specific funding is not appropriated and received by the school district then the district is relieved of these new requirements.

There are also several new provisions that add new reporting requirements by local school districts and new notification requirements to students and their parents/guardians. Sufficient time must be allotted so these mechanisms can be put in place.

We appreciate the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of this approach and we believe these areas warrant more discussion:

- Early intervention services could be costly as there are not uniform services provided. The student and the school district could benefit from continuity of care.

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- The Whole Child Task Force recognizes that leaders from across the education spectrum have a role in addressing equity and inclusion. We are grateful to be a part of the solution. We continue our commitment to the students of the State of Illinois and look forward to working towards a better system for students and their schools.
- Adding two years of “laboratory” science will add to school district expense by requiring specialized equipment and additional space. We appreciate the additional time to implement.
- Staffing for a required two years of foreign language is going to be very difficult. Foreign language teachers are among the hardest to find currently and the pipeline of foreign language teachers is not as strong as it needs to be to fill this gap. The approach the bill takes has some real unintended consequences that could lead to students having less opportunity to take advanced level foreign language courses. Again, additional time to implement is greatly appreciated.
- Developing and embedding appropriate computer literacy courses in elementary will not be as burdensome as developing them for every grade level, but it will take time and resources for school districts and could require overhauling curricula.
- Schools will be at a disadvantage planning for coursework if the Illinois State Board of Education does not develop the learning standards for Computer Science coursework in an expedited fashion. Depending on what the learning standards entail, it may be very difficult for districts to find teachers for computer science coursework.
- Nearly one-third of Illinois students meet or exceed state standards in English, math, and science. Automatic enrollment takes away the decision of students and parents about what appropriate course work looks like. If automatic advancement is the goal, it would be better suited to those that are exceeding state standards.
- Schools will be constantly trying to keep course work in line with the ever changing career path of a 9th grader. In previous sections of this bill, students must be offered courses that align to Illinois public universities, but this section expands that requirement for a certain segment of students to any university or career field across the country.

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- Advanced coursework is not best for all students, if a student is not meeting state standards, it does not make sense for them to be able to be enrolled in coursework beyond their current ability.
- Ensuring teacher capacity to meet demand of accelerated placement is not possible for a school district to achieve on its own. To increase teacher capacity, we need to overhaul teacher licensing and get more potential teachers in the pipeline.
- The Professional Review Panel should continue to examine what factors and elements move Illinois schools to equity. Changes in the formula have ripple effects down the line and will impact school districts in different ways depending on how the elements are changed.
- We remain in strong opposition to diverting tax dollars to private schools. Public education is our key to unlocking equity and justice in our state. Every dollar diverted from public education puts us further from equity and further from the future we are all striving for. We are grateful no additional dollars will be diverted beyond what is currently allowed in state law.
- We are strongly in support of efforts to increase the teacher pipeline and teacher diversity. By opening the education field to additional individuals, we are providing a pathway to success for teachers and students. Students need to be in classrooms with a steady teacher presence. By opening alternative pathways and removing barriers, we can help ensure the success of students and teachers.

We thank the General Assembly and the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus for their work on these important issues.

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