

Leadership Matters

May 2017



**Special
Edition**

State Gridlock

**Loss of Funding Leaves Vital
School Programs on Life Support**

Special Edition



“Cut staff; eliminated all summer school offerings; more textbook delays”

“school boards considering reducing or even totally closing CTE programs.”

“had to discontinue PreK-5 program for next school year”

“Only enough money to lease 1 bus; but we need two”

“can result in students not finishing high school because they struggle in purely academic classes”

“it would be detrimental to our region as well as our state to lose career and technical education opportunities”

May close pre-K for over 600 at-risk children age 3–5

“We have had to work hard to keep our tax levy flat for 5 years... Delays in categorical funding threaten all of our hard-won progress”

“...increase of class size beyond state max... Serious loss of program quality”



**Staff cuts.
Closed programs.
All because the
State of Illinois
won't pay its bills.**





Message From the Executive Director

It's time to tell your compelling story about what the budget impasse is doing to your schools

Dr. Brent Clark

A couple of weeks ago we received a few emails from school districts and school-related programs describing the negative impacts of the state's budget impasse and the state's failure to be able to fund even the one budget that was passed—the PK-12 budget for the current school year. The stories came from different geographic areas and touched on different programs ranging from operating budget woes to transportation, special education and vocational programs.

The stories were compelling enough that we decided to package them together in a Special Edition of Leadership Matters focusing on the damage being done as the political wars in Springfield drag on into year three of, as the cover headline says, state gridlock that now has many programs on life support.

These stories are but the tip of the iceberg, just a handful that came to our attention in the span of a few days. We discussed taking a few weeks and trying to get stories from hundreds of districts, but decided it was better to go ahead and put these out as quickly as possible in

the hope that it can shine some light on what is going on across our state before this session of the General Assembly comes to its statutory end on May 31.

Yes, we were fortunate to get a full-year budget for this fiscal year. However, inadequate state revenues have resulted in the state making only one of its four mandated categorical payments. It's inaccurate to proclaim that public education is being funded at increased levels by pointing to the budget that was passed because that's only half of the story. The plain truth is that many, many districts are in worse shape today than they were a year ago. And, at this moment, funding for the next school year remains trapped in the gridlock.

The years of underfunding by the state has had a cumulative effect on many of our schools, one that is getting dramatically worse. We encourage you to not only share the examples in this special edition, but also to tell your own unique stories to your communities and to your legislators. That grassroots effort is the best form of activism and our best chance to save our schools.

Brent Clark



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Grand Prairie CCSD 6

Small districts value independence, but suffer when state fails to pay



“Only enough money to lease 1 bus; but we need two”

I doubt my story is useful, because anyone from up north who reads it will probably say, “Why don’t they consolidate?” The short answer to that question is that the local community does not want to consolidate. All across Southern Illinois we have small communities who greatly value their schools.

I was hired at Grand Prairie CCSD 6 during the 2015–16 school year. The night I was hired, I told the board, “Hire me, and I’ll do the best I can to keep your school open for as long as I can.” The board president said, “That’s exactly what we want.”

Immediately, we had to borrow money just to make payroll. There was not enough money in the entire account to make payroll! My first action was to call a special board meeting to get approval for tax-anticipation warrants. To make a long story short, I showed them how to successfully pass a referendum. We paid back the warrants and we now have a balanced budget.

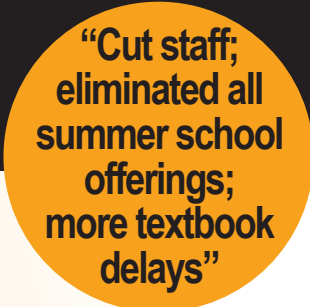
Unfortunately, we only have enough money to lease one bus, and we need two. We are making payments on the other one, but it breaks down. The state owes us transportation money, and I don’t see a way at the moment where we will be able to afford to lease another bus based on our current balance. Our spare bus is very old and worn out. There will be days next year when we will not be able to transport students reliably. At the moment, I just don’t know what we will do.

Little schools like ours are sometimes affected the most.

Ryan Robinson
Superintendent

Princeton District 115

Cuts already being made due to state’s missing payments



“Cut staff; eliminated all summer school offerings; more textbook delays”

Like many of the previous years we will be:

1. Cutting staff resulting in larger class sizes and fewer program offerings. (We have already cut our Junior High Arts program, all summer school offerings, pre-school transportation, etc.).
2. We continue to borrow and ask local taxpayers for additional funds via the tax levy. This is primarily due to failed state funding.
3. We are not purchasing as much in curricular materials and are very delayed in our textbook curriculum adoptions.

Timothy Smith
Superintendent

Williamson County Early Childhood Cooperative

May close
pre-K for
over 600 at-risk
children
age 3–5

The birth-to-five years are the most important of a child's development. Economists, business leaders, and researchers agree that high-quality early childhood services are among the smartest public investments. Early Childhood Programs provide the best and most cost effective way to provide at-risk children the chance to succeed in school and become productive adults. Williamson County leaders, administrators and Boards of Education wholeheartedly value the quality programs within the Williamson County Early Childhood Cooperative (WCECC); there is no question regarding their support.

The State of Illinois, however, is in complete financial chaos and continues to face an ongoing budget crisis. As a result, the Executive Board of Williamson County Early Childhood Cooperative scheduled a Special Board Meeting on Monday, May 1, 2017, to discuss the fate of our Early Childhood Cooperative and the services that are provided to children and families. We can state with certainty that the five member districts within Williamson County cannot continue to surmount loan debt while awaiting payments from the State of Illinois. WCECC is owed \$1,661.939 for the current school year. This amount must be paid prior to the start of 2017–2018 school year in order for Early Childhood programs to continue.

Without this amount owed to us from grant funds, it will not

be possible to open Pre-K Programs in Williamson County next school year.

The impact of closing PreK Classrooms in Williamson County is enormous. WCECC provides quality early learning and prevention for more than 600 at-risk children ages 3–5; 35 teen parents; 44 children ages birth to 3; and employs 48 staff members. Our program and teachers received three Awards of Excellence in Preschool Teaching and Learning as selected by ExceleRate Illinois. All 18 classrooms that make up WCECC are recognized as Gold Circle programs that go beyond the highest quality goals. Gold Circle programs have met the highest quality standards in three areas: learning environment and teaching quality, administrative standards, and staff training and education. WCECC is actively engaged in continuous quality improvement within the State of Illinois.

We need your help! Join us as we initiate the “Don't Shut the Door” advocacy campaign. Call local legislators, the Governor, the Senate President and the Speaker of the House—all of whom have influence on vital decisions. We are calling on Governor Rauner and the General Assembly to set aside political agendas and invest in Illinois children, families and communities. Tell them your child's story and the importance of a Pre-K Program to you and your family. We simply cannot allow them to shut the door on our children!

Jami Hodge
Director

Award-winning early childhood education programs in jeopardy



Special Education District of Lake County

“...increase of class size beyond state max... Serious loss of program quality”

Special Education district hit especially hard by missing state payments



We serve the most challenged students from thirty-one member districts within SEDOL. Special education personnel reimbursement and transportation reimbursement are major underwriters of our high intensity/high therapy classroom programs. Presently, we have received only one of four quarterly payments for special education personnel and transportation, meaning approximately \$3 million is outstanding with only two months to go in the current fiscal year.

Losing that money means special education teacher reductions and increasing class sizes beyond state recommended maximums. Again, these are programs that support the most medically fragile and physically impaired students in our county. We have made appeals to our area state legislators and they reply they are working hard but blocked by the stalemate in Springfield and no state budget or associated revenue.

The following letter was sent recently to Comptroller Susana A. Mendoza:

Dear Comptroller Mendoza,

The Special Education District of Lake County (SEDOL) is most appreciative of the recent receipt of our first quarterly categorical payment of 2016-2017. With two months remaining in the current fiscal year, our special education cooperative remains very concerned about receiving the majority of special education personnel reimbursement (Fund 3110) and transportation (Fund 3510) quarterly revenue. Combined (\$3,751,446 + \$775,002), the

two reimbursement systems amount to \$4.5 million in annual revenue for operation of our special education cooperative. Loss of any significant amount of those funds will have major negative impact on programs and services delivered to the most challenged of students in Lake County.

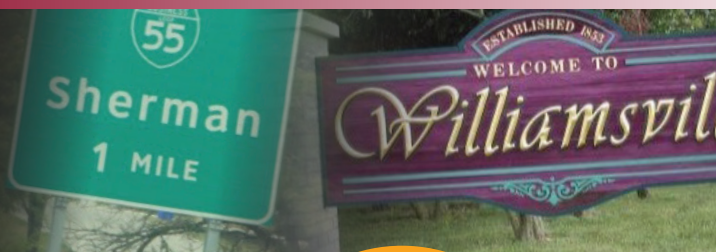
In the period immediately following the recent great recession, categorical special education payments commenced to be missing from fiscal years. The reductions that had to be made in SEDOL's classroom programs were difficult to implement. Class sizes increased beyond recommended maximums and loss of program quality were the result. In the spring of 2012, State Comptroller Judy Barr-Topinka came to SEDOL to meet with students, staff and parents. Her recognition of the serious effects that had developed resulted in a pledge to keep state categorical special education personnel and transportation reimbursements as first priority to be paid from available state revenue.

All who are concerned with SEDOL and the good education of Lake County's most challenged students realize that the absence of a state budget and sufficient revenue is certainly not the fault of our State Comptroller. We regularly check the escalating meter on your website that now tallies over eleven billion dollars in billing backlog. We have, however, realized that ardent appeals to those in positions of statewide decision making can affect the priority of payment in difficult financial times, especially in consideration of individuals who are most dependent on state financial commitments. As State Comptroller, we implore you to maintain consistent financial support for the most challenged preschool through young adult aged students in our county and about our state. Receipt of all four quarters of categorical special education payments that are earmarked for the current school year will be deeply appreciated.

In closing, I would like to extend invitation to you as our new State Comptroller to come meet our students and their providers in action. Small miracles occur every day in our classroom programs. We would love to show you how our state's investment is providing for some of the most exceptional services (and results) for Lake County's most exceptional students.

Thomas L. Moline
Superintendent

Late state payments put district's future in peril



“had to discontinue PreK-5 program for next school year”

First, we are in a tax-capped district and Sangamon County does not have a schools facilities sales tax to add as a revenue source. The district recently was forced to abate \$600,000 from our Working Cash fund to the Education Fund in order to meet our financial obligations for April. This action essentially wiped out the Working Cash fund and is only a temporary, stop-gap measure for the Education Fund. Fortunately, Sangamon County traditionally has sent us property tax revenues early in May and June. This is money that is technically revenue for FY18 (next year's budget), but we will need to use this money to survive the rest of this fiscal year. This is certainly not a recommended budgetary practice but we are simply trying to survive! This will mark the fifth time in the last six years that we have ended the year with a deficit budget.

More specifically, we have had to discontinue offering our PreK-5 program for next school year due to these budget woes. This is an awesome program that helps bridge the gap for students who are kindergarten eligible by age but may have developmental needs that would put them at academic risk in a regular kindergarten classroom. As a result, we are more likely to have students that will not be as successful in kindergarten and who may continue to need additional educational services throughout their school careers. These type of decisions are very emotional and stressful for parents, teachers, administrators, and the board of education.

I challenge the governor and the members of the legislature to come to our community and hear the pain and agony of our parents and staff. These are real people who are experiencing real pain, and all we get in return is lip service and failed promises. We need help in the form of additional funding, timely payments, and a budget. Is it too much to ask that we conduct the business of our state like every other responsible business owner and private citizen conducts theirs? How is it that every other state except Illinois can figure out a way to provide these services and uphold their responsibilities?

Don Beard
Interim Superintendent

Rally for School Funding *For more on the May 17 rally at the State Capitol, see page 10.*



Missing Education for Employment grant dollars affect vocational programs



“school boards considering reducing or even totally closing CTE programs.”

“can result in students not finishing high school because they struggle in purely academic classes”

The goal of the Education for Employment (EFE) program is to continually improve the vocational opportunities for students. We were supposed to receive \$412,000 in Career and Technical Education (CTE) funding from the state. We have only received one payment of \$107,748, and that did not arrive until late March. That money provides equipment, supplies and professional development among other things. But our hands are tied without funding, and our vocational students are not being properly served.

Dave Messersmith
Director
Western Area Career System EFE Region #265

The districts in the EFE #240 Region have, in good faith, operated CTE programs in their high schools with the expectation of receiving vocational reimbursement funding from the state through ISBE to assist with offsetting the costs of operating these higher cost educational programs. By not receiving these reimbursement funds in timely fashion, it negatively impacts the district budgets to the point of school boards considering reducing or even totally closing CTE programs.

Case in point: Agriculture Program closure at Western High School in 2015, and Technology Education program closure at Mendon Unity High School in 2016. This negatively impacts students by reducing the options they have to explore career

pathways while in high school. Moreover, in some cases, it can even result in some students not finishing high school because they struggle in purely academic classes and are not able to find a niche class to connect with a future career and in which to find success. Granted, these are extreme cases, but it does happen. Local performance data for 2015 shows that CTE concentrators at Quincy High School had a 93 percent rate of high school graduation, while the graduation rate overall for QHS was only 88 percent. Clearly, CTE participation does have a positive influence on students finding success in school.

The direct financial impact to West Central Region (WCR) EFE member schools has been significant. Ten school districts in Adams and Pike Counties were supposed to have received \$451,000. Of that total amount, \$305,000 was generated based on CTE courses operated by schools the previous year (including \$193,000 generated by the Quincy Area Vocational Technical Center). As of May 11, only \$123,000 had been received.

Due to the delay in funding payments, the WCR office has not been able to disburse any of the vocational reimbursement dollars due to the member school districts, save for one payment of \$48,000 to the area career center (QAVTC). The Quincy Area Votech Center expects to end the current fiscal year with a deficit of between \$150,000-\$200,000. If this trend continues for the 2017-18 school year, the career center may well have to seek a significant hike in tuition charged to member districts for sending students and/or cut programs to reduce costs. Higher tuition

continued next page...

Vocational ...continued

would likely cause school districts to either limit or restrict enrollment of students attending classes at QAVTC.

Mark E. Pfeiger
Director
West Central EFE Region
#240

Career and Technical Education programs in the Peoria area are suffering as well. The Peoria Educational Region for Employment and Career Training (PERFECT) EFE #300 also provides our secondary education member districts with financial assistance as well as professional development. Even though we don't have a career center, we offer work-based learning opportunities through the union trades. Our schools count on our assistance to help offset the expensive costs of offering hands-on learning environments to students. These students seek to learn skills that will benefit them when entering the workforce. We are currently vouchered through May but have

"it would be detrimental to our region as well as our state to lose career and technical education opportunities"

only received July, August and September's payments. With the growing emphasis on the lack of skilled labor, it would be detrimental to our region as well as our state to lose career and technical education opportunities in secondary education.

Christopher C. Kendall
Director
Peoria Educational Region for Employment and Career Training/EFE Region #300

In the Danville area, we get roughly \$300,000 in state money to support and promote Career and Technical Education including, but not limited to, Agriculture, Business, Industrial Technology, and Family and Consumer Science. Because we have not received these payments in a timely fashion, teachers are often saddled with broken or out-of-date equipment. Teachers do not receive the professional development they need and so desperately deserve. Finally, programing that allows students to explore careers is eliminated due to a lack of funding.

Nick Chatterton
Director
Danville EFE Region #400

Rockford Public Schools

State budget uncertainty puts Rockford's progress in jeopardy

"We have had to work hard to keep our tax levy flat for 5 years... Delays in categorical funding threaten all of our hard-won progress"



After decades of instability in the public schools in Rockford, our community finally believes the school system is on a sure footing. Voters passed not one but two referendums that allowed us to invest \$250 million in a 10-Year Facilities Plan. Our high school college and career academies have earned national recognition. We haven't had to take out tax-anticipation warrants to pay our bills, a perennial headline in days past. We have had to work hard to keep our tax levy flat for five consecutive years.

Even so, delays in categorical funding caused by the lack of a state budget threaten all of our hard-won progress in Rockford. This isn't just a story about RPS 205. In Rockford, as in many communities, the health of the public schools is inextricably linked to the health of the entire community. Despite our challenges in the past—and despite the challenges of educating in a district with an 80 percent low-income rate—the community is reconnecting with its public schools. State budget uncertainty puts that connection at real risk.

Dr. Ehren Jarrett
Superintendent

May 17,
2017
Springfield

Hundreds rally for adequate and equitable school funding



Hundreds of students, teachers and school administrators rallied for adequate and equitable funding of Illinois schools on May 17, 2017 in front of the Lincoln Statue at the State Capitol. Among many speakers at the rally were a handful of legislators, including State Senator Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill, pictured at left), who has been a leading advocate for overhauling the outdated school funding formula.

Almost every speaker talked about the impacts of both the current school funding formula and the state's failure to adequately fund public schools in Illinois.

Ironically, the rally took place on the same day that the Senate voted to pass Senate Bill 1, the school funding reform measure sponsored by Manar, by a 35-18 vote.