

## **Budget Impact**

### **Job Cuts and Budget Woes in District 122/WIFR**

The District 122 school board room felt heavy as board members voted to eliminate entire programs, their staff and other jobs across the district.

Chip Brewster

More than 100 Stateline educators are now out of work as Illinois' financial problems continue to affect local school districts. The latest budget woes are now impacting the Harlem School District.

Parents and teachers spoke before the Harlem School Board and an overflowing room Monday night in an effort to keep District 122's "Rising Stars" early childhood program.

"It's different than every program out there, they actually test them. These are your letters, do you recognize letters in your name versus letters that aren't in your name. Do you know your shapes and numbers and are you communicating that," said Jennifer Kurzynski, a "Rising Stars" parent.

Despite the outpouring of support the board voted unanimously to eliminate the \$1.4 million program and its 45 employees. Superintendent Dr. Julie Morris says without state grant funds the district simply can't support the program.

"There's a lot of tough decisions to be made and I know they all have effect on people as well, and so it's tough and people are scared and we'll just keep moving ahead," said Morris.

"Down the line Harlem will realize that they're missing out and financially I think that it will come back to hurt them in the long run," said "Rising Stars" teacher Kim Zaphel.

"I honestly think the decision was decided before we all walked in. Sad, but it's kind of the way it seems," said Kurzynski.

"There's about 182 that are supposed to be coming back next year and their parents will be told 'sorry we can't serve your child anymore,'" said Zaphel.

Two million dollars in other cuts were made including the dismissal of 58 para-professionals as the district restructures its special education program.

The para-professionals and early childhood staff weren't the only ones to be cut. Six other teachers from the high school and two more from the middle school will also be out of work at the end of the school year.

### **Granite City Early Childhood Center Fights To Stay Open/FOX2**

GRANITE CITY, IL (KTVI-FOX2now.com) - Early childhood education centers throughout Illinois are facing extinction because of state budget cuts. But the folks in Granite City vow to keep theirs open. They call it a valuable program and think it would be a travesty to cut it. Granite City board member Ron Dillard hopes the message gets through to Illinois lawmakers.

Word should come by the end of this month as to whether the early education programs will survive or fall. Some are already expecting the worst. Areas like Collinsville, East Alton, Edwardsville, and Staunton are already closing or, anticipating closing.

But, in Granite City it's a different story. They survived a 10% cut this year and hope the cuts are smaller next year. If it's not, however, board member Dillard says they'll do everything they can financially to keep their center open.

"Maybe some of these other school districts aren't committed like we are," says Dillard

They even have two "therapy dogs" on call to give their students a comfort zone if they need it. It's an active center on East 23rd Street educating some 300 pre-kindergarten students. They've got a waiting list of about 100 more and are moving ahead to accommodate them. Paul Bowler, the Madison County Special Education department, says, "We are using our stimulus money to build four more classrooms."

The center's coordinator is actively seeking support to change some budget-slashing minds in Springfield.

Jill Conoyer with the PreK Program says, "We're asking our parents and grandmothers and grandfathers and neighbors to send in letters and make phone calls to support our program."

"Early intervention is the key. If you can give them the support and the strengths now, these children will be successful later," says Paul Bowler.

Bowler thinks the economy is the reason early childhood centers are especially needed. He points out that when both parents work they have trouble finding time to prepare their children for regular school classes.

### **Pre-K cuts likely in Illinois school system/KSDK**

"Roar," growls four-year-old Jackson McDonald.

The lesson on dinosaurs may be his favorite part of pre-school, but his mother says he gets much more from his morning classes at South Roxana Elementary.

"He's come from being kind of a clingy kid," says Julie McDonald. "And now I see a lot more independence in him."

But the extra instruction and extra time to develop in a Pre-K program is in jeopardy for roughly 90,000 children across the state of Illinois, many with special education needs. With a budget deficit in the billions, the state is squeezing education dollars. And the Roxana School District says with Pre-K funding for next fall uncertain, the program must be canceled now to give affected teachers their required notice.

"He'd be really disappointed," says Julie McDonald. "He won't understand. He's too young to understand what all this means."

Educators say it will mean a burden for parents who must find daycare, teachers out of work, and kindergarten classes forced to cover less advanced material.

"We will definitely see a reflection I think in the scores in kindergarten both academically and socially," says Assistant Superintendent for Roxana Schools Steve Oertle. "Kids who don't have a year or two of this as the precursor to kindergarten come in a lot of time to kindergarten just behind."

Jackson's mom hopes the funding will come through so he can continue the pre-k classes he loves.

"He has a great time," she says. "He's proud of himself and he feels like he's doing something that big kids do."

In addition to next year's funding, Roxana administrators are also worried about state money they are owed for this year. They say the state is behind on payments by more than \$150,000.

## **Cops, child advocates urge state to restore preschool funds/Beacon News**

STEPHANIE LULAY

Restoring cuts to preschool programs today could help curb crime in the future, Kane County and Aurora law enforcement officers and legislators emphasize.

Kane County Sheriff Pat Perez, Aurora Police Cmdr. Joseph Groom and state Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia all read to Carolyn Panozzo's preschoolers at Oak Park Elementary School in Aurora on Monday.

And despite entertaining the 20 smiling 3- and 4-year-olds with tales of "Officer Buckle and Gloria," their message was serious — keeping preschools open for at-risk kids could mean keeping them out of jail down the line.

Citing evidence that preschool prevents future violent crime and saves money, law enforcement leaders called on the General Assembly and Gov. Pat Quinn to restore funding for preschool programs in the upcoming state budget. In the last fiscal year, the state cut 10 percent of the preschool program funding.

Quinn will announce the state's fiscal year 2011 budget on Wednesday.

According to an analysis released Monday by the child advocacy group Voices for Illinois Children, Quinn's proposed budget would see the Early Childhood Block Grant, which funds preschool programs operated by local school districts and qualified community agencies, cut by as much as 45 percent.

"Our members know that investing in early education is key to preventing costly crime," said Tim Carpenter, state director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois, which has 300 partner members. "It is our top priority to restore that cut."

### Studies show importance

A study of a preschool program in Michigan tracked at-risk children who attended the program and those who did not attend. At age 27, adult non-participants were five times more likely to have been arrested for drug felonies and twice as likely to have been arrested for violent crimes, the study found.

At the publicly funded Child-Parent Centers in Chicago, a study found that kids left out of preschool programs are 70 percent more likely to be arrested by age 18 than those who did participate.

"There is a growing consensus here of what really works in fighting crime," said Perez, an alumnus of Oak Park Elementary in the East Aurora district. "I'd rather see them in preschool now than in the judicial system later."

During the past eight years, Kane County added more than 1,600 3- and 4-year-olds in preschool programs, bringing the county total to 3,000 children.

#### Stimulus money used up

In East Aurora's Early Childhood Program, there are 1,090 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled, funded by \$2.8 million from an Early Childhood Block Grant and a Preschool For All Grant.

The School District used federal stimulus funds to keep four preschool teachers and four assistants at work this school year, said Christine Aird, assistant superintendent of elementary programs. Without those funds, the positions would have been cut.

"A lot of districts were able to patch together things this year to lessen the impact," Carpenter said. "We're going to see a lot more impact if the 10 percent isn't restored."

Chapa LaVia said that schools won't be able to count on stimulus money to fill in budget holes any longer.

"I don't see any more stimulus money coming for this," Chapa LaVia said. "I will be fighting for education period, and I see it as a valuable tool."

Although education is a top priority in Springfield, Chapa LaVia warned that the budget will force lawmakers to make tough decisions.

"Everyone in Springfield is going to be fighting for something," she said. "These are drastic times, and it may cost us the education of the kids."

According to Carpenter, Aurora already can't meet the demand for an additional 5,600 families of at-risk kids who cannot afford preschool.

#### West center may close

Wednesday's budget announcement will also determine the fate of the West Aurora School District's preschool program, the Todd Early Childhood Center. If the state pulls funding altogether for state-funded preschool, West must close the center, cutting all preschool programs except for the legally obligated (and federally funded) special education preschool, district spokesman Mike Chapin said.

The district said 320 West Aurora preschoolers would lose service.

The center was set to close last year until last-minute political wrangling promised money for it two weeks before classes were set to start.

Wednesday's news can only be bad — if Quinn cuts early childhood education, Todd is gone; if he keeps it, the district is "in limbo" waiting to see if the legislature finds funding for it, Chapin said.

"We would love certainty, one way or the other, I guess," Chapin said.

Carpenter said that until Wednesday, he can't predict what may happen to state-funded preschools.

"I've long stopped trying to predict the future. It could be even worse," he said. "This is the least amount of recovery we've ever asked for — getting the 10 percent back is our best case scenario."

## **Pawnee considers fee-based pre-kindergarten program/Journal-Register**

DEBRA LANDIS

PAWNEE — The Pawnee Board of Education is considering a fee-based pre-kindergarten program for the 2010-11 school year.

Pawnee board members, meeting late last week, approved eliminating pre-K for next year, but said they'll hear in April an administrative report describing how a potential fee-based program could be structured, according to School Superintendent Lyle Rigdon.

About 80 children are enrolled in Pawnee's pre-K classes, with the program costing about \$140,000 annually to operate.

The board also left open the possibility of restoring pre-kindergarten if the district gets enough government grant money.

Also at Friday's meeting, the Pawnee board for next year eliminated the junior/senior high dean of students and the position of athletic director, a move that will save about \$42,000.

A teacher probably will be appointed to handle athletic director duties, for which he or she would be paid an extra stipend. The junior-senior high principal and guidance counselor will take over the dean of students' responsibilities, Rigdon said.

The board also approved returning to a traditional eight-hour day at the high school, rather than a "block" schedule that allows for longer class periods. A traditional schedule will allow the district to operate with fewer teachers and save about \$170,000, officials said.

The Pawnee board, which declined to extend Rigdon's contract for next year, expects by next month to have an agreement in place for an interim superintendent for 2010-11.

Because the interim superintendent will work only part-time, the district expects to save \$50,000 to \$60,000 on its superintendent salary, Rigdon said.

## **Local preschool programming already being cut/Beacon News**

EMILY McFARLAN, ERIN CALANDRIELLO

Kane County law enforcement officers' calls to keep state funding for preschool programs come as area school districts already are preparing to cut those programs because of the state's failure to deliver funding as promised in the past year.

Next school year, Elgin School District U46 plans to shut down one of its three early childhood learning centers — which serve preschool and kindergarten students — to save over \$300,000, according to district officials. That school will be identified publicly at the next school board meeting on Monday.

The cutback is because the state owes U46 a total of \$12.2 million.

U46 spokesman Tony Sanders said students now at the soon-to-be closed school "won't be affected, and they'll go into the other centers."

But the cuts could scale back the number of incoming early childhood learning students, Sanders said.

On top of that, preschool and kindergarten staffing will be cut much deeper than last year because of the unknown amount of state funding for early childhood education. Last year, Sanders said, the state cut its early childhood learning budget by over \$200,000; however, the state didn't announce these cuts until after the district had announced its layoffs for the year. So the district legally could not lay off more early childhood learning teachers, he said.

This year, the district is erring on the side of caution and pink-slipping more early childhood learning staff to avoid the same situation from recurring, Sanders said.

In neighboring Community Unit School District 300, the school board is considering eliminating district-provided transportation for its preschool programs.

"Preschool For All is a wonderful program. It's optional. It's not required," said District 300 Superintendent Kenneth Arndt.

"We're not talking about eliminating the program; but at the rate the state is going, that's something we'll have to give some real thorough discussion," he said.

Arndt reiterated none of the cuts the Carpentersville-based school district so far has proposed will directly affect student learning.

District 300 is considering cutting all transportation for its preschool programs, except for special education students, in the face of almost \$5.8 million in categorical funding it has not yet received.

"We're telling parents we're really in a pickle," Arndt said. "We don't have the funds to keep (the schools) open, let alone transport. We're asking them to meet us halfway."

Transportation is a significant part of those categoricals. So far, the school district only has received one of four categorical payments for the current 2009-10 school year, and each of those payments is about \$6 million.

And it's a significant part of the district's budget. Half of the cost to run the deLacey Family Education Center in Carpentersville is transportation, Arndt said.

The District 300 Board of Education already cut \$4.6 million from its 2010-11 budget in February.

And like U46, the District 300 school board was expected to vote to lay off six preschool teachers at its meeting Monday night in anticipation of preschool enrollment dropping without transportation. Some of those teachers could be hired back this summer as enrollment allows, district officials have said.

The school district will vote whether to cut a total of \$1.6 million in transportation — \$672,000 from that Preschool For All program — at its meeting Monday, April 26.

Arndt said the state deficit reminds him "a little bit" of District 300 in 2006, when it passed a "Hail Mary" referendum to pull out of a \$27 million deficit.

"We had to make some cuts and ask voters for a referendum to raise taxes, and we got out of that pickle," he said. "It was tough. It was very tough."

### **District 300 board lays off more than 100/Daily Herald**

Jameel Naqvi

As expected, the Community Unit District 300 school board on Monday laid off more than 100 teachers to cope with almost \$6 million in delayed state payments.

But the dramatic move may be only the tip of the iceberg for the state's sixth-largest district, which is based in Carpentersville and includes the Dundees, Sleepy Hollow, Hampshire and parts of Algonquin and Lake in the Hills.

In front of a Carpentersville Middle School auditorium of about 250 parents, teachers and taxpayers, the administration on Monday presented new budget scenarios that would make Monday's cuts look like a gift.

The district is currently contemplating \$6.5 million in cuts for the 2010-11 school year, with \$4.7 million of those reductions already approved.

Under the worst-case scenario outlined Monday, the district could be in line for \$8.4 million in further reductions for next year's budget. That projection assumes the state will slash education funding by 10 percent to 15 percent.

District officials likely won't know the extent of education cuts for months, although Gov. Pat Quinn's Wednesday budget address should provide some indication.

But the school board is facing an impending state-mandated deadline by which it must notify teachers they will not be retained next year - meaning the district has about a month left to lay off more teachers.

"The board has two choices: You either cut next year - or you run in the red next year and make cuts the following year," Chief Financial Officer Cheryl Crates said.

Most board members expressed their preference for the former; that is, preparing a balanced budget next year - and cutting deeply to do that.

"I would certainly want to see a balanced budget," board President Joe Stevens said. "I would much rather run a surplus than a deficit."

The district is still scheduled to take action on almost \$1.6 million in transportation reductions and more than \$800,000 in savings from furlough days, but those reductions would help the district meet only its original target of \$6.5 million.

Superintendent Ken Arndt said he will present additional reductions at the board's April 12 meeting.

Monday's layoffs, which affect 112 first- and second-year teachers and six preschool teachers, won't take effect until the end of the school year.

## **Classroom teachers may be part of Dist. 186 layoffs/Journal-Register**

PETE SHERMAN

Proposals to cut the Springfield School District's budget continued to evolve at a crowded Springfield School Board finance committee meeting Monday.

In late February, School Superintendent Walter Milton proposed eliminating 56 classroom-teaching positions, only to say a few days later that he meant non-classroom teaching positions, such as literacy coaches and teacher mentors.

As of Monday, however, roughly half the positions to be cut appeared to be classroom-based.

Of the 56 positions, according to district personnel director Alexander Ikejiaku, 23 would come from increasing class sizes in schools where a classroom teaching position could be cut without violating maximum-class-size requirements. Another 31 positions would come from hiring fewer people to fill vacancies. Two more positions would be trimmed from alternative-program classrooms.

Since the district usually hires more than 100 new teachers annually to fill vacancies, Ikejiaku said many of the people in the eliminated positions will have an opportunity to teach elsewhere in the district.

Board members asked Milton whether additional cuts could be made in administration, travel, consulting, professional development and supplies. Milton has proposed cutting about \$1 million by freezing administrative salaries, eliminating at least one central-office position and reducing non-personnel spending.

While the school board has a couple of months to make final decisions on next year's budget, which takes effect July 1, some personnel decisions might have to be made as early as Monday's regular school board meeting.

The budget cuts are a response to flat or declining revenue projections, mostly due to state government's financial crisis. The district also is trying to reverse \$8 million in anticipated deficit spending this year.

The district's budget forecasts look bleak. Under one scenario, state funding alone could cost the district an additional \$7.5 million.

The district's fund balance for education expenses could shrink from \$20 million to \$8.4 million. The district also is planning for a 10 percent hike in healthcare costs and has just started bargaining with teachers for a new contract.

Milton did provide some good news Monday. The district's preschool program is currently not being considered for cuts, but state funding for early childhood education is uncertain.

Other possible budget steps could include early retirement incentives, re-aligning the district's non-classroom teaching staff, and requiring six teachers to lead multi-grade classes next year.

Milton said next year's budget will continue to take shape.

"These are not easy decisions," Milton said. "We have a lot of complexities to really think about and analyze, and we have to think about the impact this is going to have on students. We have to think about the impact this is going to have on our faculty and staff and their morale."

Milton answers budget questions

School Superintendent Walter Milton has posted answers to 35 budget-related questions submitted by the Springfield Education Association, which represents the district's teachers. The questions were submitted after hundreds of teachers attended a special Springfield School Board meeting Feb. 25 about Milton's proposed budget cuts.

To read the SEA's questions and the district's responses to them, visit [www.springfield.k12.il.us](http://www.springfield.k12.il.us) and click on "Superintendent's Corner."

### **Board members cut \$4 million from Moline schools to trim deficit/Quad-Cities News**

Nicole Lauer

MOLINE -- Fifth-grade music was saved Monday by school board members who largely stuck with nearly \$4 million in cuts recommended by Superintendent Cal Lee.

More than 100 people attended the three-hour board meeting at Moline High School; 17 people addressed the board about retaining music programs, decreasing class sizes and other items.

The audience applauded when board members voted 5-2 to retain fifth-grade band and orchestra, with only board president Connie McElyea and board member Alan Anderson opposing the motion. The vote came after debate and a presentation showed involvement rates and travel time required by teachers commuting to district buildings.

In total, board members voted nearly 20 times Monday in search of solutions for a \$6.5 million district deficit projected by June 30 and another \$7.5 million deficit anticipated by June 30, 2011. Board members unanimously approved the release of 106 nontenured staff members, expressing hopes of rehiring 90 percent of non-part-time staff, about 70, if state and federal grant funding allows.

Moline faces problems similar to those of other Illinois school districts awaiting millions in late state aid payments. Gov. Pat Quinn's proposed solution to Illinois' budget problems includes eliminating 17,000 teachers, a move The Associated Press said is needed even if lawmakers agree to the Gov. Quinn's income tax hike request.

Board member Jim Kopel said they faced tough budget decisions Monday and can expect more this spring based on the governor's plans to decrease general education funding by 11 percent, or \$1.4 billion. That would lower the "foundation level" of state support for each student from \$6,119 now to about \$5,600 next year, according to The Associated Press.

"If the decrease comes about from the state of Illinois, we'll be back again," Mr. Kopel said.

Mr. Kopel and board member Dr. Rafat Padaria recommended several removals and additions to Mr. Lee's list of budget cuts. Despite much debate and frustration, however, board members could not agree on many alterations.

Dr. Padaria recommended Phase II cuts currently not recommended by the administration. That included a one-year freeze for administrative pay to save \$96,999, a proposal that failed 3-5 with votes from her, Mr. Kopel and Alan Anderson.

Dr. Padaria also recommended the district's athletic director be reduced to half time to save \$36,962, a proposal backed only by her and Mr. Kopel.

Mr. Lee recommended not replacing seven retiring elementary teachers to save \$750,700. Dr. Padaria, however, wanted the positions filled to prevent larger classes sizes. She urged the board to consider replacing at least some of the positions, but her request failed 3-5 with Mr. Kopel and Cecilia O'Brien joining her.

Dr. Padaria said she was frustrated the board could not find more ways to avoid cuts that impact classroom learning.

"We did have other options," she said. "We had other options which we kept saying nay, nay, nay to."

Mr. Kopel sought additional savings by eliminating a high school administrative position, eliminating nongrant-funded K-12 summer school programs, reducing Hamilton and Ericsson principals to half time, eliminating two elementary assistant principals, reducing one central administrative assistant, eliminating high school department heads and eliminating a high school counselor.

All were defeated.

Ms. McElyea said she thought the board did its best to choose cuts with the least impact.

"I'm OK with it," she said. "I think the biggest thing is we did cuts across the board and that was obvious."

Board members on Monday also approved ending an agreement with Arrowhead Ranch at the agency's request. The four tenured Moline teachers who had taught at Arrowhead now will be placed back within the district.

### **Georgetown-Ridge Farm board cuts \$600,000 from budget/News-Gazette**

Douglas Toole

GEORGETOWN — School officials cut \$604,000 in staff, programs and materials from the upcoming school year on Monday in an effort to prepare for a drop in state funding.

Superintendent Greg Irwin said he was preparing for a \$620,000 reduction in general state aid next year — a “worst-case scenario” that he said was entirely possible.

According to Irwin, from July 1, 2009 to Jan. 31, 2010, the state has fallen behind \$351,858 in payments to the district. The state also still owes the district about \$500,000 from the previous fiscal year.

Irwin said he also expects the state to reduce the amount of general aid it provides to districts next year by as much as \$700 per student. That would mean a loss of \$620,000 to the district next year.

### **Champaign school board cuts jobs, other expenses/News-Gazette**

Jodi Heckel

CHAMPAIGN – The Champaign school board on Monday night approved cutting the equivalent of four full-time high school teachers next year – two at Central and two at Centennial High School – in addition to other jobs and expenses.

The goal of the district for making budget cuts for next year was to keep the cuts as far from the classroom as possible, said board member Sue Grey.

Before voting unanimously to approve \$2.3 million in cuts and revenue enhancements, several board members said they were satisfied the district has done that as well as it could.

The cuts also include: reductions in departmental budgets at the district level (not building budgets); the elimination of three director jobs and one special education administrator job; and the end of the extended-day program at Stratton Elementary School. The district also proposes selling land near Barkstall Elementary School and Dr. Howard Elementary School, and putting an energy savings program into place.

### **Wednesday hearing will allow tenured teachers scheduled to lose extracurricular assignments to address School Board/Herald-Whig**

HOLLY WAGNER

The Quincy School Board will hold a hearing at 4 p.m. Wednesday in the School Board office at 1416 Maine on its tentative decision to reduce extracurricular assignments to tenured employees.

The district offers more than 50 extracurricular activities at the high school and junior high, from football to rifle club. Board Vice President Tom Dickerson said everything is open to consideration.

At the hearing, the board will take comments from people who would be affected by a decision to cut extracurricular activities, Superintendent Lonny Lemon said.

"We don't know what to expect," he said.

The School Board and district administration are looking for ways to trim another \$2 million from the district's budget for next year.

Lemon has already announced budget cuts of \$1.8 million that include closing Irving Alternative School and moving its students to a program that would be privately operated out of a school facility.

The plan also includes closing the Teen Parent Services/Adult Ed program and serving those students in programs available elsewhere, such as in the Teen Mother Program at the high school and the adult ed program at John Wood Community College.

At its last special meeting, called to discuss options for further budget cuts, the board listened for an hour to comments from students, staff and concerned citizens about the impact of closing Irving Alternative School and the Teen Parent/Adult Ed programs.

The board is preparing for its own shortfall of \$1.2 million as detailed by budget projections. Meanwhile, the state has fallen \$3.8 million behind in its reimbursements to the district, and is likely to drop its general student aid next year another \$3.7 million for the district. This comes on the heels of two years in which the district cut about \$4.6 million.

At Wednesday's special session, the board also is expected to approve moving its next meeting to March 24 from March 17 and to hire an auctioneer and authorize the advertising budget for the sale of 1444 Maine and 1421 Jersey.

The board will then go into executive session to continue discussion of the budget. There may be time afterward for general public comments, Lemon said.

### **District 150 approves staff reorganization/Journal Star**

More than 30 positions effectively terminated

DAVE HANEY

PEORIA — More than 30 administrative positions at Peoria School District 150 were effectively erased Monday night.

The School Board unanimously approved the measure affecting coordinators, directors and administrative staff members in all departments within the district's central administration. It also requires those employees affected who wish to remain to reapply for their jobs, if those positions will remain.

Prompting the move in part is the upcoming retirement of at least six key administrators as well as a need to address inefficiencies, Interim Superintendent Norm Durflinger said. Durflinger, with the help of the incoming superintendent, Grenita Lathan, will redraw a new administrative organizational chart.

The board's vote came just minutes after district officials again noted the current school year is on track to end with a \$6.5 million deficit. It also is poised to issue a huge number layoff notices later this month to teachers and other staff members.

Without any changes to current operations and factoring in a potential cut in the state's "Foundation level," District 150 could wind up with a \$20 million or more deficit by the end of the 2010-11 school year, "if we do nothing - without one electric bill getting higher, or health care not costing more or paper not costing any more," Durflinger said.

The practice of pink-slipping is common among school districts. Notice must be given to certified employees by April 1, according to state law.

The difference this year is fewer people likely could be recalled before the start of school in the fall. District officials have said that some tenured teachers also would be on the list, which is unusual, because of a high school closing.

What school districts across the state face is putting together a budget that hinges on a level of state funding that is largely up in the air. State officials have talked about \$1 billion in cuts in education funding.

### **Delavan readies for school cuts/Journal Star**

District 703 may lay off 7 staffers, eliminate art if state slices funding

MATT BUEDEL

DELAVAN — Like other school districts across the state, Delavan District 703 finds itself taking unprecedented measures to combat budget shortfalls.

In the near term, that means dipping into reserves and cutting some programs and staff for the next school year. But Superintendent Mary Parker, like her other counterparts throughout Illinois, fears the future may be worse.

"I see it's going to be detrimental in the effect it has on students," she said. "Students are going to be the ones who bear the brunt of it."

The state already is behind in payments to District 703 by \$212,802 for the current school year, though the district has built up enough reserves over the last decade - \$1 million - to cover that deficit.

Next year, however, Parker calls it a conservative estimate to predict a \$450,000 funding loss from government sources. The district already has planned cuts to match that amount.

"We will not have art," Parker said. "Art will be cut completely."

Some staff members, too, will be cut. The district plans to let go five nontenured staff members and two noncertified staff members next school year.

Those individuals already have been notified of the layoffs, which will be officially considered for approval by the District 703 School Board on March 15.

Administrators in the district also have taken a pay freeze for the next school year to help cut losses.

"We thought we needed to step up and lead by example," Parker said.

Parker is encouraging people to contact state lawmakers in support of House Bill 4711, which generally would exempt school districts from following mandates that are imposed without an appropriation to fund the expenses related to the requirements.

Without that type of legislation or an unexpected increase in funding, Parker said the district could use its entire amount of reserves relatively quickly.

"Since I've been here, we've never had to go into deficit spending," Parker said. "That would eat up our reserves pretty fast."

### **West Richland cuts several teaching positions/Olney Daily Mail**

Kevin Ryden

Noble, Ill. - West Richland School District Board of Education approved cutting several teaching positions and accepted two retirements during a special meeting Friday at West Richland Junior-Senior High School.

Following an executive session that lasted nearly 30 minutes, the board approved several resolutions, including the authorization of the "honorable non-reemployment" of full-time first-, second- and third-year teachers (Rylan Rusk, Jason Wagner and Samuel Sterchi) and the "honorable dismissal and reduction" of tenured teachers on extended contracts (Jennifer Tedford, Betty Klingler and Jim Love).

The board approved the resignations of WRHS Lead Secretary Cindy Huchel, who has worked for the district for 31 years; and district secretary, bookkeeper and payroll clerk Phyllis Pflaum, who has worked for the district for 38 years.

The board also approved hiring Rylan Rusk as the nine-month agricultural teacher at the high school.

All the votes were 6-0 with board member Aaron Wease absent.

No one from the public addressed the board during the meeting.

Superintendent Anthony Galindo said there would be \$89,000 in savings to the district so far.

Prior to the executive session, Galindo said the district has been looking into making approximately \$110,000 in cuts. He said the board planned to discuss potential certified-personnel cuts at Friday's meeting and that next month the board could start looking at other areas to possibly cut and the best ways to staff both schools.

He warned that the district's reserves, which will be about \$821,000 by the end of the fiscal year, will be eroded during the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

If the state cuts 10 percent of its aid to districts, West Richland could lose \$330,526, \$72,000 of which would be a loss because of reduction in the district's enrollment, Galindo said. If the state cuts 15 percent of aid, the district could lose \$443,000, he said, adding there is no way to know right now what the state plans to do.

"We are looking at shooting arrows in the dark, so to speak," he said, but emphasized the district is trying to do the best it can.

The district has been receiving state-aid payments but not categorical payments. Galindo said the state is proposing to cut \$2.2 billion in spending, much of which would affect elementary and secondary education.

In addition, if 10 percent of the foundation level for districts was cut 10 percent, West Richland would lose approximately \$600 per student, Galindo said. If there were a 15-percent cut, the district would lose approximately \$705 per student, he said, adding that Illinois State Board of Education has requested the state keep the funding at \$6,119 per student.

The district has an enrollment of 353 students. The state calculates its aid by taking a three-year average of a district's enrollment.

Based on West Richland's enrollment this year with \$6,119 in foundation-level funding, the district receives approximately \$2,160,007. If the district lost 10 percent of that funding per student, it would mean a total loss of \$211,800. If the district lost 15 percent, the loss would be \$248,865.

Gov. Pat Quinn's budget director David Vaught told the Associated Press Saturday that general-education spending could fall by \$1.4 billion and that the foundation level could drop to \$5,600.

Also during Friday's meeting, the board discussed a possible athletic cooperative agreement with Clay City. However, no decisions were made.

West Richland and Clay City's boards met Thursday in Clay City to discuss a co-op. They will meet again to discuss the issue.

What has been agreed upon so far between both boards is that the co-op, which would start next year, would only be for high-school sports for now.

Issues such as salaries for coaches, eligibility requirements and transportation still have to be worked out.

The name and mascot would be the host school's name first and the non-host school's name second. The mascot would be the host school (for example, West Richland–Clay City Wildcats for girls basketball, softball and baseball and Clay City–West Richland, or Noble, Wolves for boys basketball, cheerleading and volleyball).

The non-host school would have two home games in each sport (except volleyball) held at its facility. Volleyball games would be split between the two schools.

Each district would pay half of the costs for each sport regardless of how many players each school would have on a team. Each district would also provide a coach for each sport.

Galindo suggested principals from both schools and maybe another representative from each district, including athletic directors, interview coaching candidates to lessen the perception of favoritism.

Galindo emphasized that coaches would choose the teams based on the best players, not the numbers of players from each school. He said having a co-op does not require the same number of players on a team from each district.

West Richland could host outdoor sports, such as baseball and softball, and Clay City could host indoor sports, such as basketball, Galindo said. He said West Richland has better outside facilities while Clay City has better indoor facilities.

Transportation would be the responsibility of the non-host school. Although there has been discussions of requiring coaches to have an appropriate license to transport students, WRHS Principal Kevin Westall said he personally would not want coaches to do that.

President Brian VanBlaricum said an assistant coach could drive.

Both districts have different academic eligibility requirements.

West Richland does not allow athletes to have any failing grades while Clay City allows one failing grade. West Richland's grading scale goes to 60 percent for a passing grade while Clay City's goes to 70 percent.

Galindo said he would like to see the same eligibility policy for both districts, but noted that West Richland could keep its grading scale if it wanted or adopt the same policy as Clay City.

(Note: All votes are unanimous unless indicated otherwise. Board members include board President Brian VanBlaricum, Dennis Anderson, Carlyne Brooks, Lisa Hemrich, Steve Kinkade, Aaron Wease and Brian Weidner.)

## **LW teachers won't give up raises/Southtown Star**

SUSAN DEMAR LAFFERTY

Lincoln-Way High School District 210 teachers union leaders said they would not give up pay raises, but they are willing to talk to school administrators about solving the district's financial woes.

"There's always room for talk," Lincoln-Way Education Association president Dan Moore said after issuing a news release Saturday in which he placed blame for the money crisis solely on the state.

"The state of Illinois has failed its students repeatedly by failing to fix an unfair and broken system of school funding that has led to the current crisis. No short-term local fix will correct this system or properly fund education. The solution lies solely at the General Assembly," he said in the release.

The state's financial crisis has been anticipated "for years," he said. The teachers' three-year contract, signed in September, called for a 1 percent raise in this school year, 2 percent next year and 3 percent in 2011-12. There were no changes to the benefits package. The union includes 480 teachers.

Supt. Lawrence Wyllie said that because of a lack of state funding, it is likely administrators and support staff will forgo their raises in the 2010-11 school year, and he asked the union to do the same. The plan won't come before the school board for at least a month, he said.

Moore said Wyllie left him a voice mail message asking if the union would be willing to hold off on those raises. Union leaders and their negotiation committee - a group of five - met and rejected that idea.

Moore said it is up to Wyllie to make the next move.

"We care about the kids, and we want to work together," Moore said.

"Honoring commitments in good times and bad is a standard that we continue to maintain," Moore said in the release. "It is no more fair for the school district to ask teachers to open the contract and repeal raises in lean times than it would be for the teachers to demand an open contract for greater raises in times of surplus."

Moore also urged all voters to contact their legislators about finding a permanent long-term solution to end the "roller coaster" in school funding.

"Our students are worth no less than high-quality education in all economies," he said.

## **Rockford School District budget counts on wage freezes/Register Star**

Cathy Bayer

ROCKFORD — The Rockford School District budget could take a harder-than-expected hit unless each of its labor unions accepts a wage freeze for the 2010-11 school year.

How those labor contracts are structured and other variables such as timeliness of state aid payments and the number of pending teacher retirements also will play a role.

The district's 2010-11 budget is already laid out with the idea that all seven unions — including teachers — agree to a pay freeze, Superintendent LaVonne Sheffield said today. The district also must dip into its reserves to the tune of about \$30 million to balance the spending plan.

In addition, the district is waiting on \$9.6 million in state aid. If the state doesn't pay its bills, Sheffield said, additional cuts may be on tap for 2011-12.

"They're not choices you want to make," she said. "They're choices you have to make."

Two of the district's labor unions already have agreed to a wage freeze for this year. The School Board will vote Tuesday night on a three-year contract for food service workers that includes a pay freeze in the first year — which ends June 30 — and a freeze on health care costs for all three years.

The School Board approved a similar deal for its union paraprofessionals Feb. 23.

Teacher contract talks are supposed to begin next month, although about 1,000 teachers met with union leadership Sunday to discuss negotiations in a closed-door meeting at Guilford High School. Rockford Education Association President Molly Phalen declined to say what was discussed, but promised today that she'd have more to say after the School Board meeting Tuesday night.

The teachers contract expires June 30. How much savings the district would realize from a teacher pay freeze depends on how the freeze is structured. A base-pay freeze, for example, still would allow many teachers to earn more money next year. That's because teachers earn additional pay for their years of experience and additional schooling and certification.

A base-pay freeze would only affect teachers who have reached the top tier of seniority on the teacher salary schedule. Those teachers, under such a scenario, could only earn a larger income next year if they did extra work like coaching a sport or supervising a club. So-called "differential" pay can range from a few hundred dollars to several thousand dollars a year.

The district is also dealing with several unknowns that will affect next year's budget, including the number of teachers who plan to retire at the end of this school year. Not all teachers have submitted their letters of intent to retire, said Matthew Johnson, a Guilford High School teacher and a member of the REA bargaining team.

### **Harlem School Board votes to cut program, about 120 jobs/Register Star**

Kevin Haas

MACHESNEY PARK — The Harlem School District will cut about 120 jobs as part of an attempt to control spending and overhaul special education programs.

The School Board approved the plans Monday in unanimous votes.

A new comprehensive special education plan is meant to provide students with more targeted instruction from certified experts, and provide teachers with more support for their special education students. Administrators point to statistical research that shows a correlation between certified teachers and student success.

The plan calls for the elimination of 58 paraprofessional positions, coupled with the addition of 18 certified special educators, and would save Harlem \$460,061. Cost savings, however, are not the reason for the program changes, Superintendent Julie Morris said.

“I don’t want people to focus on that being our rationale for this change; it is strictly a programmatic change based on best practice and research-based practices,” Morris said.

#### Reductions opposed

The Harlem Federation of Teachers and Harlem Federation of Support Staff opposed the reductions.

“Paraeducators provide a vital role in the support of Harlem students and teachers, serving to provide additional resources and guidance for those students that deserve and need extra assistance and attention,” a statement from the unions to School Board members read. “The plan ... will only serve to drastically decrease the quality and quantity of services provided to these students.”

The program model was instituted at the high school this fall and has seen early success, Morris said.

“Our paraprofessionals work very hard; there’s nothing against the work that they do. We just need more expertise in the area of special education services in those classrooms and working with those teachers and students,” she said.

The changes go into effect this fall. Job cuts will be based on seniority.

#### Other program changes

The board also approved other program changes Monday that, unlike the special education plan, are strictly budget-related. The district wants to save about \$1.89 million through budget reductions, staff cuts and increased fees.

An additional 59 positions will be cut as part of the reductions.

Total cuts add up to \$3.3 million. Officials expect to lose about \$2.1 million from the loss of state grants and an increase in unemployment expenses.

The district also will increase its meal prices and change its Medicaid program to bring in an additional \$714,000.

The price of breakfast will increase by 15 cents and lunch by 25 cents.

#### School District owed \$2.5M

The state owes the Harlem School District about \$2.5 million, as of Feb. 28. Officials anticipate fewer grant dollars to support such programs as Rising Stars. About \$500,000 in state grants that support Rising Stars is owed to the district.

Board members decided that the pre-kindergarten program for at-risk students could not be afforded without state grant dollars. It will be eliminated as part of reductions.

Dozens of parents, teachers and other supporters showed up at Monday’s meeting to plead with the board to spare Rising Stars.

“It (is) just a wonderful program,” said Alexandra Teleso, who has had two children in Rising Stars. “It teaches so much, from shapes and colors to reading full books. Without it, who knows where our children will be.”

The program serves about 400 students, said Kim Zaphel, a Rising Stars teacher.

“It’s looking at the whole picture and not just cutting for the sake of cutting. These reductions and these changes in programs are very strategic and comprehensive,” Morris said. “They’re very difficult decisions to make, but they’re made with a very sound decision-making process of what’s going to positively affect student achievement, and to alleviate, as much as possible, the negative impact on the students and the staff.”

### **Geneva schools forced to cut \$1.4 million/Daily Herald**

'These are not easy times,' trustee says  
Susan Sarkauskas

While Geneva Unit School District 304 officials backed off some cuts proposed to help balance the district's budget, it pretty much stuck to a plan to reduce spending for next school year by about \$1.4 million.

To help avoid a budget deficit, administrators had suggested cutting six elementary-school library assistants, seven special education assistants, the middle-school police liaison officer, two school secretaries and the coordinator of accelerated and enriched education.

But board members, district staff and local residents who attended a public forum on the matter Saturday all opposed the library, special ed and accelerated/enrichment coordinator cuts.

The district has 93 special-education assistants. Superintendent Kent Mutchler said there are cases where students do not need an assistant the whole day, and therefore could share one. Ultimately, however, the staffing level will depend on what the individual education plans for special-education students mandate.

Instead of cutting all the elementary library assistants, their hours were reduced. Each elementary school will have an assistant two hours per day, except for Williamsburg, which will get one three hours per day because of its larger enrollment.

"I'm still not entirely happy with it," school board member Kelly Nowak said, suggesting the district should consider taking some of the money used for the middle- and high-school library assistants and use it for the elementary programs. "If we have to be cutting hours, we shouldn't be cutting them from children that aren't self-sufficient (using the library)."

The accelerated/enrichment program will have a "lead teacher" next year who will be paid a \$2,500 stipend. The original recommendation was to have building principals take the reins of those programs, but parents of gifted students didn't like that idea.

Trustee Leslie Juby questioned how many hours a week the lead teacher would work on the program, and what specific duties the person would have. Neither has been finalized, according to Craig Collins, assistant superintendent for human resources.

That was one of the reasons Juby voted against the budget recommendation, while the rest of the board voted for it.

Trustee Mark Grosso, who campaigned last year on a promise to critically question spending while being sure not to let frugality hurt students, said "we're very close to that line."

He has recommended consolidating clerical and administrative positions, doing mandatory reviews of whether positions need to be filled after a retirement, and reducing stipends paid to teachers for activities beyond classroom work.

"If it weren't for harder times, we probably wouldn't be looking at this at all," board President Mary Stith said of eliminating the accelerated/enrichment coordinator post. "These are not easy times. But I also respect the people who have come to us and said, 'Please, please balance our budget.'"

Cuts: Board member says frugality close to hurting students

### **New Dist. 203 contract calls for freeze, then 2 raises/Daily Herald**

Melissa Jenco

Naperville Unit District 203 has inked a new contract with its teachers union that calls for average pay increases of 2 percent for the next three years.

The school board voted 6-1 in favor of the deal Monday. Officials said they expect to have a balanced budget for at least the next five years.

"The goal was fiscal responsibility, the goal was clarity of language and the goal was to build for the future," Superintendent Mark Mitrovich said. "I think we have more than accomplished those."

The new deal freezes salaries for most teachers during the first year with the exception of those getting more education or nearing retirement.

In the second year, teachers will receive average pay increases of 2.84 percent.

Base raises in the third year will be 75 percent of the 2010 rate of inflation, which is not yet known. With the additional "step" increase for experience, officials estimate the average increase will be 3.14 percent.

The contract also gives teachers pay increases of up to 6 percent in each of their last four years before retirement.

In addition, the district and teachers will form a committee to develop a new compensation system.

No layoffs are planned for the coming school year.

Board President Mike Jaensch, Vice President Jackie Romberg and board members Suzyn Price, Terry Fielden, Jim Dennison and Susan Crotty voted in favor of the contract.

Crotty called it a "seismic shift in how business is done" and "truly a look to what the economy looks like and what we can afford going forward."

Dennison said he had expected a "WWE throwdown" but wound up being pleased with the professionalism of the teachers and that there is no deficit spending.

Dave Weeks cast the lone "no" vote. He applauded teachers for accepting the one-year pay freeze but criticized the salary bump for retirees and what he saw as a lack of transparency in the contract process. He also believes a three-year deal is too risky given the economic unknowns.

"I just think it's unwise for us to commit to a future that we don't understand," Weeks said.

Last week, roughly 91.8 percent of the union's 1,350 teachers approved the deal that goes into effect July 1.

## **Two D204 schools could enter new program/Beacon News**

JENETTE STURGES

Changing demographics around Indian Prairie District 204 means changing the way some of its schools receive and use federal funding.

At Monday night's school board meeting, Jay Strang, assistant superintendent of instructional services, and Jenny Giambalvo, Title I coordinator, presented plans to the board to change two elementary schools to Schoolwide Title I programs.

Georgetown Elementary and Longwood Elementary now have the highest percentage of low-income students in District 204, with 43.18 percent and 40.69 percent of students considered low-income, respectively. Both schools crossed the 40 percent line, far above the district's 10.69 percent average, in the past six months.

The higher percentage of low-income students means Georgetown and Longwood now qualify for the Title I Schoolwide Program.

Eight of the district's 21 elementary schools are Title I schools, and they all receive funding as Targeted Assistance Schools. Schools receiving this kind of Title I funding must target their extra federal dollars to those low-income students who are identified as failing or being at risk of failing. Supplemental education programs and extra staff members who are hired must be specifically used to assist only these students.

The Schoolwide Program for which Georgetown and Longwood are now eligible is a more comprehensive reform model under which federal funds can be used to upgrade the entire school without targeting individual students for increased achievement. That is, funds under the Schoolwide Program can be used to assist all students and make more sweeping changes to the school.

The shift to the Title I Schoolwide Program at Georgetown and Longwood would mean significant changes to how they would help the schools' many disadvantaged students, including training all staff members at the schools and increasing parent involvement to help students achieve. The schools will not likely see more funding as a result of the change, but they would be able to reach more students with the funds they have.

Administrators say this flexibility will increase their ability to reach students in need more effectively.

"I was concerned that maybe we might be setting ourselves up for a situation where the title resources would then be expended for the benefit of all the students in the building and that there might be less effect on the 40 percent or so that needed it," said board member Mark Metzger. "But it never occurred to

me that the flexibility that this provides actually lets you do more than you would otherwise be able to do, so it's actually not that. It's the opposite."

The process of applying for the change through the Illinois State Board of Education will take approximately one year as administrators develop a plan for the switch.

### **Geneva will keep school library assistants, but with reduced hours/Beacon News**

CHARLOTTE NORGAARD

GENEVA -- Library assistants will still be used in Geneva elementary schools, but their hours will be reduced.

Recommendations for the Geneva School District's education fund budget for the 2010-2011 school year were approved on Monday, but included concessions in two areas of concern that have been raised by parents, teachers, and Board of Education members of the last few weeks.

The board approved the nearly \$1.4 million in cuts to the budget by a vote of 6 to 1. Leslie Juby cast the lone "no" vote.

Administrators had originally proposed that the district eliminate all library assistants at the elementary level, as well as the position of district acceleration and enrichment coordinator.

Based on apprehension expressed about how this will affect the libraries' ability to adequately serve children, the board approved a reduction in library assistant hours.

"We decided to reduce library assistant time and estimate time on a need based on enrollment and needs at each elementary school," said Superintendent Dr. Kent Mutchler.

In addition, while the district still plans to eliminate the acceleration and enrichment coordinator position, a lead teacher position will be established for a current teacher within the district, who will serve much like a department head.

This individual will receive a \$2,000 stipend for the added work that will come with the position.

"This person would be the go-to person to help keep the program coordinated," said Mutchler.

Like most other area school districts, Geneva has been forced to make major cuts in its budget due to ongoing struggles in the economy, state funding uncertainty and the consumer price index. The CPI for next year is 0.1%, and will allow for only a slight increase in property taxes.

Geneva will begin additional reductions to its operations and maintenance fund, and transportation fund, in April, with a final budget expected to be adopted in September.

### **Kaneland schools cut 23 positions/Beacon News**

LINDA GIRARDI

The first round of Kaneland School District cutbacks involves 23 positions for the 2010-11 school year.

The cuts include 10.6 certified teaching positions, 9.5 education support staff positions and two administrative posts, as well as fifth-grade band, the replacement of middle school interscholastic sports with an intramural program and the elimination of 10 high school coaches.

The School Board on Monday approved \$2.6 million in cuts as part of a Phase I cost reduction package, plus an additional \$532,075 with the implementation of a salary freeze for all administrators and non-union educational support staff and a decision to defer the purchase of new technology.

Also on the chopping block were new library books and the 11 high school clubs and activities that parents and students asked the School Board to spare.

District officials said the first round of budget cuts are driven by declining revenues due to the economic downturn, specifically the low consumer price index (which limits the increase in property taxes) and minimal new residential construction.

District officials said eliminating the teaching positions in the first phase of cuts will not translate into current teachers losing their positions, because 11 Kaneland teachers are retiring.

"In Phase I, there's not an impact tied to increasing class size," Associate Superintendent Jeff Schuler said.

But the board has begun planning for a second phase of deeper budget cuts that could mean the loss of teaching jobs.

Schuler said they had a session with state legislators, but "unfortunately, it reinforced the fact that our planning in Phase II is not only practical but needed given what we continue to hear in cuts to educational spending in the state."

Last month, the board directed the administration to develop a plan for a "reduction in force" of first, second and third-year non-tenured teachers, as well as part-time teachers.

This is needed to give the district "flexibility" because of the uncertainty in general state aid.

"It will involve shifting of staff within our staffing plan," Schuler said.

District officials said their financial consultant verified information out of Springfield about a possible 10 percent cut in the state funding level for public schools. They said the potential loss to the Kaneland School District could range from \$1.4 million to \$2.4 million.

On Monday, Schuler said it is likely the administrative team will identify at least 30 positions to meet a \$2.2 million target for Phase II. Schuler said as they identify potential cuts, it may be necessary to include a couple of fourth-year teachers.

"The big picture question has to shift from does the potential cut impact students to which of the negative impacts are we most willing to absorb?" he said.

Schuler also presented a preliminary timeline that has the School Board voting March 22 on a resolution to release the first- through third-year teachers. On April 12, the administration will present an initial Phase II reduction plan, with a final decision on May 24 even though the state may not have finalized its budget process.

## **Tremont School Board approves cuts/Journal Star**

Eight positions, two high school programs cut  
MATT BUEDEL

TREMONT — School Board members on Monday unanimously approved the most crucial cuts in a budget reduction package intended to offset a precipitous drop in state education funding.

In all, the Tremont Community Unit School District 702 board eliminated the equivalent of eight full-time certified and non-certified staff positions and cut two high school programs associated with some of those positions.

The cuts will take effect next school year. Board members approved the cuts without discussion.

Superintendent Don Beard said state funding still owed this year, meanwhile, may be slashed even more. The state currently owes the district almost \$300,000 and may determine funding levels for April, May and June based on the district's level of reserves.

Beard has said the district already anticipated dipping into reserves by \$400,000 or \$500,000 by the end of the school year.

The package of budget reduction measures approved Monday for next school year will shave the general education budget by 10 percent, slashing expenditures by an estimated \$600,000. The loss of eight full-time certified and non-certified positions will come out of a total of about 100 similarly categorized positions currently in the district.

Programs to be eliminated include the industrial technology and family and consumer sciences courses on the high school level. Some of those courses could be replaced with online equivalents that do not have any hands-on time. Each of those programs has about 75 students apiece enrolled in related courses out of 1,001 students in the district.

## **District Finances**

### **Restaurant to raise funds for school's playground/Register Star**

Betsy Lopez Fritscher

POPLAR GROVE — Arturo's Mexican Restaurant owners Zulma and Arturo Torres are giving 10 percent of their Sunday profits throughout March to help Poplar Grove Elementary School buy additional playground equipment.

"There are so many kids at that school now that when they built the school bigger there wasn't enough room for all of the kids on the playground," Arturo said. "My wife and I talked about it, and we knew we had to do something to help. That's how we came up with this idea."

Poplar Grove Elementary School Principal Sharon Olds explained that since the school added 13 classrooms and a multipurpose room in 2008, its population has grown from about 180 students to 305, resulting in not enough playground equipment for all the school's students.

"I just think it's really great they're doing this," she said. "We've been fundraising for a new playground pretty much since after we got the new addition on the building."

The school's PTO has been behind the playground fundraising efforts to date, Olds said. She believes having a business aid in fundraising will help the school reach its goal of having additional equipment installed and purchased by this fall.

"Playgrounds are not cheap," she said. "We hope to have about \$25,000 to \$30,000 for this."

The school's PTO has raised \$6,000 toward the purchase of new equipment, said Poplar Grove Elementary PTO President Cassie Turner. The PTO hopes to raise an additional \$5,000 by May from its April fair at the school.

"We've tried many different fundraisers to get to our goal, and it's just not happening as quickly as we'd like," she said.

North Boone Education Foundation will award a grant to the school later this year to help with the playground project, too, though no dollar amount has been specified, said foundation President Kent Kniep, who also serves as president of Poplar Grove State Bank.

"They just have to do a little bit more legwork and they'll be all set," he said. "We're kind of waiting to see what playground they pick and what the fundraising has been."

Zulma Torres hopes other businesses in the community donate, too. The couple's two older children went to Poplar Grove Elementary and with their youngest, 9-year-old AJ, still at the school they felt a calling to give what they could. They plan to present the school with a check on March 29.

"If all the businesses do a little something, we can do this," she said.

"We're from here, we live here, so it's nice to be able to help and say thank you to the community," Arturo said. "They're helping us do this."

### **South Beloit School Board OKs electronic sign/Register Star**

Melissa Westphal

SOUTH BELOIT — School Board members approved an electronic marquee sign deal on Monday night despite hearing a few hesitant comments about moving forward with this type of financial investment in a tight economy.

The deal puts an electronic sign that will display messages about sporting events and other district information outside of South Beloit High School. The space is there, officials just need the sign.

Scott King with Sports Image Inc., a sports marketing franchise, will sell the advertising to pay for the Nevco sign, meaning the sign must be brought in at no cost to the district. The total project cost is estimated at about \$90,000, and half of the money will cover the sign, with the seller getting the rest.

School officials said the advertising would have to be secured and sold before the district would receive the sign. They discussed spending \$4,000 to install the sign once it's ready.

Officials debated installing the sign themselves but decided to roll the money for the sign installation into the advertising costs so the sign would be completely covered by its five-year warranty so the district wouldn't have to pay separately for the installation.

The final vote was 4-2, with board members Scott Bonnet and Linda Chambers voting against it. Board member Ted Zierath was absent.

The sign has been on the district's wish list for at least eight years, and officials have said if the project goes well, they would like to see electronic signs at all of the schools.

#### Coaching contracts discussed

Board members delayed voting on a new salary schedule for coaches, opting instead to further research the issue. Bonnet, the board president, said the group is trying to make the salaries more competitive and create an actual schedule that puts the information into one place.

The board agreed that it's important to have athletic directors and coaches involved in the discussion. Bonnet said he wouldn't be surprised if the issue was delayed a year until the economy improves and the district better understands its future state funding situation.

#### Schools receive awards

Riverview Elementary School and Blackhawk Elementary School/South Beloit Junior High School recently received Illinois Spotlight School awards.

The awards recognize high-poverty, high-performing schools that succeed in closing the achievement gap. The Illinois State Board of Education said 425 schools made the 2009 Illinois Honor Roll list for spotlight schools.

## **Illinois Schools**

### **MVTHS seeking to improve test scores/Register-News**

TESA CULLI

MT. VERNON — It will take three to five years to “adequately address” student test scores at Mt. Vernon Township High School, according to Superintendent Dr. Michael Smith.

Smith presented information about the year of planning to improve test scores, address the organizational structure and develop a system to monitor and measure progress of students to the city council on Monday, and when asked about the facilities, Smith admitted his first goal is to improve the test scores and implement responses to intervention.

Councilman David Wood questioned Smith about the facilities and his opinion that the existing high school campus is “the number one thing holding back Mt. Vernon.”

“I have heard that opinion, and heard it since I arrived,” Smith said. “I have been here seven or eight months, and been approached numerous times about my opinion. There are those who express the opinion the campus is fine, those who want to build new, those who want to renovate and those who want a combination of a new campus and renovate the existing campus.

“The facilities are adequate where we are at now, with the finances and strategic planning and getting our academic planning up and running,” Smith continued. “Once we go a good degree to getting those fish fried, then we can look at vocational areas, and 21st Century classrooms. Then it's a topic for discussion

for what happens beyond what is adequate but preparing our students for making better than adequate preparation for the future. That would be a topic of discussion for the community in the future.”

Smith said the main goal at this time is to address the curriculum and learning needs of the students.

“It will be a minimum of a three to five year process to adequately address the issues of significant improvement of student test scores,” Smith said. “...The time will come for the discussions. If the state has construction money available for us later this year, that discussion may come sooner, since we would only have one year to put together our match or lose the money to someone else.”

However, finances at the school are another major area of concern, with the district in its first year of filing a mandatory three year deficit reduction plan with the Illinois State Board of Education and the state falling short on making its payments to school districts.

“Our district will lose \$400,000 to \$500,000 in state aid this year,” Smith reported to the council. “Now we will have to make \$950,000 in reductions.”

Smith said there is a “very real potential for reductions in staff and teachers” due to the shortfall. The school has 156 full-time employees, with 95 certified staff, not including administrators.

“And, who knows where the (ISBE) financial profile will put us,” Smith said. “I don’t know if they will penalize us when it’s the state withholding the funds.”

The high school board will be meeting tonight in special session to discuss action regarding a reduction in force of certified personnel tonight at 6 p.m.

### **Harvey’s mayor in line to also be its schools chief/Tribune**

District’s ‘superintendent designate’ got the votes of 2 relatives and 2 city employees  
Kristen Schorsch

Mayor Eric Kellogg had to like his chances when Harvey Public School District 152 voted to select a new superintendent.

Of the school board members who voted 4-2 for Kellogg to lead the district, one is his sister, one is his cousin and two are on the city payroll, working under Kellogg.

The board did not conduct a search or interview for a successor to Supt. Lela Bridges, who is retiring in June.

Instead, board members tapped Kellogg as "superintendent designate." For seven years he has led south suburban Harvey, an impoverished city of 30,000 plagued by crime, scandal and red ink.

"If I were a voter in Harvey, I would be very concerned with those conflicts of interest," said David Morrison, deputy director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform.

Kellogg, 54, is poised to take over one of the poorest districts in the state. Nearly 96 percent of the 2,600 students in the elementary school district are low-income, Illinois school report card data show.

Kellogg could be in line for a hefty pay raise, though he has not been offered a superintendent contract. He makes nearly \$107,000 a year as District 152 assistant superintendent, while Bridges makes \$202,000 a year. Kellogg also makes nearly \$60,000 a year as mayor and has a \$30,000 expense allowance.

The school board named him "superintendent-designate" at a Nov. 16 board meeting and asked Bridges to train Kellogg to replace her. The meeting agenda did not say the school board would vote on Bridges' successor.

The Tribune started asking questions and requesting public documents in January. The district posted the superintendent's job on its Web site for five days in mid-February. Six people applied, including Kellogg. It's not clear what the search means for his status as "superintendent-designate."

There's nothing illegal in Illinois about running a school district and a city at the same time or receiving a promotion from a board that includes relatives and city employees. School districts often promote from within, but allowing someone to have those two taxpayer-funded jobs is unusual, experts say.

Decisions could be influenced by the health of the district or city finances, or by hiring relatives or contractors who donate to Kellogg's political war chest, said Robert Strauss, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University who has studied government influence on public schools.

"If (Kellogg is) going to wear both hats, that in itself creates all sorts of questions about does he have enough time, because managing a school district and a municipality, no matter how small or how large, is each a pretty big job," Strauss said. "And the usual thinking is schools are kept separate from cities."

Kellogg said he would talk about his potential new job but that he needed Bridges' permission.

"I truly appreciate you giving me this opportunity to talk with you because I certainly have a plethora of things" to speak about, Kellogg said in a phone call last month. "If I can get clearance, I certainly would love to talk to you."

Bridges said she granted Kellogg permission to talk to the Tribune. But he refused on multiple occasions, eventually saying after a school board meeting that the entire board would have to grant him permission.

Three of the four board members who voted for Kellogg to become superintendent-designate refused to comment. They are board President Tyrone Rogers, who makes \$43,264 a year as a Harvey parking lots supervisor; George Robinson, who makes \$29,994 as a coordinator at the Harvey Community Center; and Kellogg's sister, Joyce Kellogg-Weaver.

Board member Linda Hawkins, Kellogg's cousin, said he is "perfectly qualified." She pointed to Chicago Mayor Richard Daley when asked if Kellogg could juggle two big jobs.

"Mayor Daley does it all the time," Hawkins said. "He is the mayor of the city, and he's over the schools. He appoints his school board and superintendent and everything."

Kellogg, who has been District 152's assistant superintendent since 2001, has a master's degree in education and is pursuing a doctorate in educational leadership at Argosy University. He began his career as a gym teacher.

School board member Gloria Johnson, a retired educator, said she felt the decision was rushed and voted against the promotion.

"I feel that (superintendent is) a job that requires quite a bit, and I also feel that the mayor's job requires quite a bit," said Johnson.

School board member Keith Price, a Harvey alderman, indicated he's worried about Kellogg taking over the schools given his track record with the city.

"With my time in this city and just with him being the mayor, I would not want him to be over another large budget," Price said.

Harvey, a once-bustling industrial town, started its budget year more than \$13 million in debt.

Kellogg has at least five relatives on the city payroll, including Harvey's highest-paid employee, his niece Bettie Lewis, who makes nearly \$170,000 a year as city attorney.

The city's claim to fame now is its abandoned Dixie Square Mall, which has been shuttered since 1979 but was used for an infamous car chase scene in the 1980 film "The Blues Brothers."

Harvey's dismal record of unsolved violent crimes and allegations of police abuse have led to dozens of lawsuits and prompted the FBI, state and county agencies to raid the department.

In January 2007, then-U.S. Sen. Barack Obama delivered a speech in Harvey honoring civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr..

"Some folks here in City Hall think that maybe the office that they possess is because they're so special, it is supposed to be a place where they can help their family and friends instead of helping the people who elected them," Obama said.

Voters re-elected the Harvey native to a second four-year term in 2007. He gives back to his community with book-bag giveaways, free prom gear for girls who can't afford it and \$100 checks for top students.

Nichele Camphor, 40, who has four children in District 152 schools, said she thinks Kellogg needs to reduce crime and clean up a city checkered with abandoned buildings before he takes on another busy job.

James Lee, whose third-grade daughter goes to Bryant Elementary School in District 152, was concerned about the mayor taking another important job given his reputation.

"There's a trust issue there," Lee said.

### **Public input sought at education summit/Register Star**

Cathy Bayer

ROCKFORD — Superintendent LaVonne Sheffield has an idea as to what success will look like in the Rockford School District, but she wants the public's input at an education summit.

Visualize 2015, a five-year strategic plan, is the road map to success in the district, Sheffield said.

"We need help, too, to push us to greatness," she said.

Sheffield developed goals with the School Board: enhance learning opportunities for all children; ensure parents are partners in the education process; provide clean and safe schools; hold adults accountable; and run an efficient business operation.

Sheffield's first year ends June 30; now it's time to look ahead and have the public help, she said.

She's looking for ideas from the community at an education summit open to the public — parents, students, teachers, taxpayers, business leaders. For example: Should the district's bilingual program change? Should the district have more content-specific schools, such as RESA Middle School's focus on environmental science, and Barbour Language Academy's focus on language? What should the district's arts program look like?

Sheffield said she has ideas, but she wants community buy-in at the March 20 meeting at Eisenhower Middle School.

"How we get there will be the discussion," she said.

Becky Bone, a national literacy consultant, also will speak about the changing education climate, and explain how a high-performing school district should look.

Sheffield and her administrative team must create a strategic plan, and she wants it to have long-term effects.

The summit will be the first of several meetings about the district's success, she said.

"To do a year-by-year plan without continuity, it doesn't make sense," she said.

Seating is limited; about half of the tickets have been reserved. The Eisenhower auditorium can hold 444 people, and the district has an overflow backup plan. If people can't sit in on the main group session, additional people can attend the breakout sessions, because they'll be in classrooms.

### **New student advisory group aims to make a difference/Register Star**

Betsy Lopez Fritscher

ROCKFORD — Nearly two dozen Rockford School District students have formed a Superintendent's Student Advisory Council that aims to elevate the district's image and offer meaningful community service.

Student members explained the initiative during a news conference Sunday at Heartland Community Church, 1280 S. Alpine Road.

"I see this growing to where the whole community will be a part of it," said Liz Smith, a senior at Roosevelt High School. "The community is going to have our back in everything we do and in everything we speak about. There are students in Rockford School District who care about their schools and about the community."

Rhode Saint-Fleurose, an East High School sophomore, explained the council's first service project: to help package 500,000 meals for victims of the earthquake in Haiti as part of the Heartland Church Million Meals for Haiti project.

Superintendent LaVonne Sheffield listened to the students and said afterward that they made her proud.

“They did this by themselves,” she said. “That’s our typical student. They’re bright, energetic, and I like being around them. They developed their agenda and I’m behind it 100 percent.”

Mark Bankord, chairman of Rockford Sharefest, said the Student Advisory Council has lots of potential.

“What was so fun is what they delivered was way more than everybody expected,” he said. “They actually used the meals initiative to launch much bigger ideas — which is to change the image and communications of our public schools. When students own it as opposed to the adults, it really changes things.”

### **150 board proposes cutting comment time/Journal Star**

DAVE HANEY

PEORIA — A proposal to cut the number of public comment sections at School Board meetings from two to one is moving forward.

Monday was the first reading of the proposed change to board policy, approved 6-1, essentially consolidating the two opportunities people have to make comments. Board member Laura Petelle was the lone dissenter, citing "First Amendment rights."

A handful of those in audience, most of whom regularly attend School Board meetings, also opposed the measure.

"People at this podium don't come just to talk to you, they come to present to the public and the media a side of the issues that are not discussed or acknowledged by your side of the table," said Sharon Crews, a retired teacher who comments frequently at meetings.

District 150 currently allows two times for people to make comments at meetings - once on action items, and a second time (immediately after the first) to comment on any topic. Both take place toward the start of the board meeting.

The policy change will come back to the board on March 22. If approved, it would go into effect immediately, though the change would begin in April.

Also new in the suggested policy would be the requirement that those who wish to address the School Board fill out a card. While the new rule does not state what the card would contain, board members said it could ask for name, address, possibly even the topic a person plans to speak on.

The Peoria County Board incorporates a similar practice at its public board meetings.

What District 150 officials have proposed would not alter the time people have to speak, currently five minutes apiece.

Board policy also limits time on any one subject to 20 minutes, though that is rarely enforced.

- The School Board on Monday also approved the 2010-11 school calendar. The first half-day of school for primary and middle school students - fee day for high school students - is Aug. 31. If no emergency days are used, the last day of class would be June 7.

Because of changes in the teachers' contract, the 2010-11 school calendar contains no primary early-release days - which riled many in the public and came to be known by some as "Wacky Wednesdays."

### **Naperville junior high student faces weapon charge/Daily Herald**

Melissa Jenco

A student at Naperville's Lincoln Junior High recently was arrested after staff members found a glove in his locker with scissor blades sewn into the knuckles.

The male student was charged with misdemeanor unlawful use of a weapon, Naperville police Cmdr. Mike Anders said.

A student at the school alerted staff about the weapon on March 3. School staff searched the boy's locker and found the glove as well as a knife, Anders said. They contacted police who investigated and arrested the student.

The boy was taken to the police department, processed and turned over to his parents.

"At no time did we have any information that indicates any students were in any type of harm," Anders said.

The charges against the boy pertain to the bladed glove, not the knife. Police would have had to prove intent to commit a crime in order to charge him in relation to the knife, Anders said.

He did not have information as to the size or type of knife.

Police plan to handle the incident with the parents instead of sending it to the juvenile court system.

Melanie Raczkiwicz, associate superintendent for operations in Naperville Unit District 203, would not comment on the situation because it is a disciplinary matter.

District 203 policies state the school board can expel a student for up to two years for violating its weapons policies.

### **Hononegah parent files complaint over remark by algebra teacher/Register Star**

Melissa Westphal

ROCKTON — A Hononegah High School parent has filed a discrimination complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, demanding an investigation into racial remarks a teacher made to her daughter in class.

Kelly Wilkerson of Rockton said she had no choice because district officials didn't take her initial complaints seriously, she said.

"I felt like I didn't have any other recourse but to get legal counsel, which is exactly what I did," Wilkerson said. "I feel like (my daughter's) civil rights were violated. I have to struggle with making her

go to school every day. She wants to go to an all-black school. She wants to be where all the blacks are, because she does not ever want to feel that stigma. And Hononegah is responsible for that.”

Wilkerson’s daughter, Hononegah freshman Antoneisha Walker, said the incident took place in early December, when her algebra teacher was discussing an equation she had written on the board. When Walker said she didn’t understand the problem, the teacher said Walker wouldn’t because “it’s a white thing,” Walker said.

“So then she put another problem on the board and said ‘You’ll get this one,’ ” Walker said. “And I asked, ‘Why, because I’m black?’ And she said, ‘Yeah, you’ll get it.’

“It embarrassed me in front of the whole class because I’m the only black person in there, and it was like I just wasn’t going to catch on with the rest of them.”

Disciplinary actions confidential

Wilkerson doesn’t know if other Hononegah students have experienced a similar situation, but said she’s coming forward to make sure it doesn’t happen to anyone else.

She met with Principal Ehren Jarrett the morning after the class, she said, and asked him to address the situation. Walker was moved out of that class the next day, and according to a Dec. 10 e-mail exchange between Jarrett and Wilkerson provided by Wilkerson, Jarrett said the school responded “with immediate discipline for the teacher.”

The Register Star filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the School District for communications between Wilkerson and district officials, as well as any disciplinary reports stemming from the incident, but was denied based on student and teacher privacy laws. Administrators, including Jarrett, Superintendent Randy Gross and Lynn Gibson, director of planning and grants, said they could not discuss the issue for the same reasons.

An e-mail to the teacher seeking comment was not returned.

‘Abuse is abuse’

“If there are kids in the hallway calling Antoneisha names, I’ve raised her to have a tough skin,” said Wilkerson, a former Register Star employee. “You chalk that up to their parents being really ignorant and you pray for them and move on. But what do I tell my child when it’s coming from the teacher? I don’t have recourse for that. And that’s why I’m so upset. ... To me, I look at it as abuse is abuse.”

David Thomas, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Education, confirmed that an open case was filed Feb. 19 alleging that Hononegah discriminated against a student on the basis of race. He declined to elaborate further, saying the case is being evaluated to determine if the allegations warrant an investigation.

Register Star requests to Wilkerson, her attorney and the Education Department for a copy of the complaint were denied.

Wilkerson’s and Walker’s Chicago-based attorney, Jennifer Soule, said the complaint addresses “systemic problems” at Hononegah.

“We get the strong sense that the school did not fully appreciate the impact of the teacher’s conduct on the child,” Soule said. “(Wilkerson’s) point is to create a better environment and make sure this doesn’t

happen to her child or another child again. ... Communities like Rockton and Hononegah are only going to become more diverse, so the School District needs to step up.”

‘I’m not going to go away’

In her initial e-mails to school officials, Wilkerson had requested that the teacher be removed from Walker’s class.

“I believed that they were going to remove the teacher when they found out that this was in fact true,” Wilkerson said. “When they found out it was in fact true, they removed my child. So that made it seem like the punishment was geared toward her.

“(The teacher) made racist comments. I had a real problem with that. We are taxpayers, our monies pay for the ... school. You just can’t have teachers here making racist remarks and expect me to push it under the rug. I’m not going to go away.”

### **Mark Bills student charged in arson at school/Journal Star**

PEORIA — One Mark Bills School student has been charged with aggravated arson and another has been disciplined after a March 1 fire at the Northwest Peoria middle school.

Peoria police said a 13-year-old boy was arrested for using a lighter to ignite items in a partially open locker on the second floor of the school at 6001 N. Frostwood Parkway. The boy has been charged with Class X aggravated arson and is Tuesday in Peoria County court.

Police said he and another student were in a hallway outside their classrooms when the 13-year-old asked another student if he had a lighter. Not knowing how the lighter was going to be used, the second student handed it to him.

Police said the boy they arrested had been recommended for expulsion from the school, and the other child was suspended.

District 150 spokeswoman Stacey Shangraw confirmed two students were disciplined, but she cited privacy laws in declining to specify the punishment. The range of possible disciplinary actions, outlined in a district policy manual, includes suspension or expulsion.

School personnel and firefighters put out the fire without much incident, and about 250 students and faculty escaped safely after the 1:50 p.m. fire.

Shangraw did not have a monetary damage estimated but said some lockers and ceiling tiles may need to be replaced. A large number of coats and other items in lockers had to be sent out for cleaning because of smoke damage, Shangraw said.

Classes resumed at the school the day after the fire last week.

### **Prank on bus no laughing matter/Beacon News**

ANDRE SALLES

AURORA -- A pair of East Aurora High School students decided to pull a prank while on a school bus Monday afternoon. But the State Police weren't laughing.

The bus was returning from a field trip to the Holocaust Museum in Skokie around 2 p.m. According to State Police, two students decided to amuse themselves on the long ride home by writing signs and flashing them at passing drivers.

One sign read "Please help us," and the other said "We were kidnapped," according to police.

Some concerned drivers saw the signs and called State Police, who pulled the bus over at New York and Kendall streets in Aurora around 2:20 p.m. Police removed the two students from the bus and spoke to them on the side of the road.

No charges were filed, police said, but parents and school administrators were contacted.

Clayton Muhammad, spokesman for the East Aurora School District, said the students would be disciplined.

"We understand it's a joke," Muhammad said, "but it could be taken seriously."

## **Opinions**

### **Letting parents save school programs/Daily Herald**

Daily Herald Editorial Board

School boards are taking it on the chin these days, with meeting after meeting in which irate parents and sincere students beg that their favorite academic or extracurricular programs be taken off the chopping block.

So it must be tempting when those interested parties volunteer to come up with funding and keep a program afloat. Imagine - free money, and at least one group of constituents that could walk away satisfied. Happy ending, right?

Not so fast.

We understand parents' desires to do whatever it takes to enrich their kids' lives and make them competitive for college. But school boards need to take a critical look to make sure any parent-funded rescue plan is fair to everyone.

Some obvious conflicts emerge. Contributing money to help save a program shouldn't be tied to your child making the team or getting first chair in the orchestra.

There are other considerations. School boards owe it to their communities to keep programs equal at schools across the district, even though the ability to raise funds might be vastly different. Parents looking to save, say, elementary school art class need to organize a plan to keep the program going at every elementary school in the district. And school boards should accept no less.

With so much at stake, school boards need to give an ear to every proposal for retaining programs. But the ones that move forward also should meet another criteria. Successful proposals need to include plans to carry on funding, not just mount a one-year rescue. Otherwise, "the parents are just writing a check. Can we assure that long term?" asks Ken Kaczynski, school board president in Elgin Area District U-46.

Those are just the first steps. School boards have another layer of questions involving liability and supervision of programs that aren't paid for out of their budgets.

It sounds impossible to jump all these hurdles. But it's not.

Lake Zurich Unit District 95 parents organized and held fundraisers ranging from a golf outing to T-shirt sales with a goal of raising \$200,000 to save fourth- and fifth-grade band and orchestra at all five elementary schools. They worked with administrators and the school board to understand budgeting and staffing processes and got the program reinstated, using just \$35,000 of the group's funds, with the rest squirreled away for future years.

During battles to save a particular program - successful or not - a bonus for school boards and administrators is introduction to a group of impassioned, organized community members and students. Perhaps their skills can be put to use helping to save other programs that are equally important but, for any number of reasons, might lack such resourceful backers.

Now, that would be a happy ending.

### **Ready, reset for schools/News-Democrat**

The impending retirement of school Superintendent Greg Moats gives Belleville High School District 201 the opportunity for an organizational reset -- something school leaders everywhere will need to do sooner or later given the new fiscal realities.

Gov. Pat Quinn plans to cut state education funding by 11 percent, or \$1.4 billion, which his budget director said could result in the layoffs of 17,000 teachers statewide. But teachers should be the last cut, not the first. Administrative and overhead costs present less disruptive opportunities for savings.

Administrator compensation might be a place to start. In Illinois, superintendents' average compensation increased from \$145,000 in the 2007-2008 school year to \$151,000 in 2008-2009 -- a 3.7 percent bump up. By comparison, most workers in the private sector saw their wages frozen or decreased in the same period.

School districts need to revamp and streamline administrators' duties so they can operate with fewer assistant superintendents and vice principals. State lawmakers need to enact a two-tiered pension system, so new hires no longer get gold-plated retirement benefits.

And dare we raise the idea of school district consolidation again? It is inefficient and costly for Illinois to have 879 school districts. St. Clair County has 27 school districts, including several with just one or two schools, each with a superintendent.

No one wants to give up his kingdom. But if the choice is between teachers in the classroom or administrators in offices, which would you choose?

### **On to college.../Tribune**

If nothing else made you feel good last week, you had to smile at the news out of Urban Prep Academy for Young Men, a charter school in Englewood.

Every one of the 107 students in Urban Prep's first senior class has been accepted to a four-year college.

That's a remarkable achievement, especially considering that the overall college acceptance rate for Chicago public school graduates is 52.5 percent. And that number doesn't include the many students who start high school but don't finish it.

Urban Prep's acceptance rate would be the envy of any school, public or private. But consider this: When these seniors entered Urban Prep as freshmen, only four percent read at grade level. And 82 percent of the school's students come from low-income families.

Urban Prep helped the kids make up ground by implementing a tough, college-prep curriculum that required double periods of English. All told, Urban Prep students spend 72,000 more minutes in the classroom than their peers at regular CPS schools.

We've been harping on that for a long time. Fact is, Urban Prep should be the norm, not the exception. Most Chicago public school students spend far too little time in the classroom.

Urban Prep hasn't necessarily turned miracles. The average ACT score for its students is lower than the systemwide average for Chicago Public Schools. The kids qualified for college based on a lot more: their grade point averages, tough course loads, extra activities, etc. And because they had a single focus: going to college. Even before the first day of freshman year at Urban Prep, students go on a field trip to Northwestern University. The message is clear: This is your future.

Tim King, the school's founder and CEO, recognizes that he can't simply bid these students adieu. The college graduation rate for African-American men isn't good. The school's counselors will support these young men through their college careers.

Let's hope that in four years Urban Prep can hold a welcome home event and show off 107 college degrees.

We wouldn't bet against that. Nice going, gentlemen. You should be proud.

### **Healthier options better for kids than sweet soda deal/Register Star**

RRSTAR.COM EDITORIAL

It strikes us as hypocritical to the max that a “pouring rights” contract with Coca-Cola in District 205 helped pay for gym uniforms at some schools.

Be healthy, the message was, but not too healthy — we need the money.

The twisted message was not lost on Superintendent LaVonne Sheffield, who has made the right recommendation: to pull all carbonated beverages from the schools and replace them with water and low-calorie drinks.

A 10-year, \$7.5 million contract with Coke expires June 30. The contract gave \$4 million to the district upfront and an additional \$350,000 a year. The annual payment was doled out school-by-school based on the volume of drinks sold at each school. Schools used the money to fund field trips, gym uniforms, SMART Boards (interactive whiteboards) and other extras.

The district now will negotiate a contract to provide beverages to the schools, but it likely will be less lucrative because it doesn't include the sweetened soda options.

Jefferson High School did right by students several years ago when it decided to phase out the sale of soda, making it an option only after classes ended at 3:30 p.m. Jefferson's take of the annual Coke contract payout decreased from \$34,000 six years ago to only \$8,000 last year.

The Jefferson booster club president bemoaned the loss of money, but his Guilford counterpart had the right attitude. "It's better for us in the long run," Lane Martin, booster club president at Guilford High School, said.

It sure is.

The average child consumes 172 calories of sugar-sweetened beverages every day. Between 1978 and 2000, consumption of these drinks per capita nearly tripled among all U.S. consumers.

Meanwhile, in the past 20 years, the rate of obesity among adolescents ages 12 to 19 more than tripled. The increase in adolescent obesity could be responsible for a 19 percent increase in American deaths from heart disease by 2035, according to a study published in 2007 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

More and more, doctors are treating children with problems once limited to adults — conditions like type 2 diabetes and compromised liver function, both related to obesity.

The beverage industry alone is not to blame for the epidemic of overweight people in the country, but it is a prime contributor.

Will kids drink sweetened sodas anyway when they are outside school? Of course. That doesn't mean the schools should feed their habit. They shouldn't contradict the messages taught in health class.

A healthy body really does go hand in hand with a healthy mind, as Superintendent Sheffield reminds the community.

We are glad the Rockford School District takes seriously the effort to reduce extra calories in children's diets. Every little bit helps: Because of the push by groups such as the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, there has been an 88 percent decrease in total beverage calories shipped to schools between the first half of the 2004-05 school year and the first half of the 2009-10 school year. (The alliance is a partnership between the American Heart Association and the William J. Clinton Foundation.)

Schools are supposed to teach kids about making the right choices. No matter how you shake it, they just aren't doing their jobs when they allow sodas to be sold.

### **Why I Changed My Mind About School Reform/Wall Street Journal**

Federal testing has narrowed education and charter schools have failed to live up to their promise.

DIANE RAVITCH

I have been a historian of American education since 1975, when I received my doctorate from Columbia. I have written histories, and I've also written extensively about the need to improve students' knowledge of history, literature, geography, science, civics and foreign languages. So in 1991, when Lamar Alexander and David Kearns invited me to become assistant secretary of education in the administration

of George H.W. Bush, I jumped at the chance with the hope that I might promote voluntary state and national standards in these subjects.

By the time I left government service in January 1993, I was an advocate not only for standards but for school choice. I had come to believe that standards and choice could co-exist as they do in the private sector. With my friends Chester Finn Jr. and Joseph Viteritti, I wrote and edited books and articles making the case for charter schools and accountability.

I became a founding board member of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and a founding member of the Koret Task Force at the Hoover Institution, both of which are fervent proponents of choice and accountability. The Koret group includes some of the nation's best-known conservative scholars of choice, including John Chubb, Terry Moe, Caroline Hoxby and Paul Peterson.

As No Child Left Behind's (NCLB) accountability regime took over the nation's schools under President George W. Bush and more and more charter schools were launched, I supported these initiatives. But over time, I became disillusioned with the strategies that once seemed so promising. I no longer believe that either approach will produce the quantum improvement in American education that we all hope for.

NCLB received overwhelming bipartisan support when it was signed into law by President Bush in 2002. The law requires that schools test all students every year in grades three through eight, and report their scores separately by race, ethnicity, low-income status, disability status and limited-English proficiency. NCLB mandated that 100% of students would reach proficiency in reading and math by 2014, as measured by tests given in each state.

Although this target was generally recognized as utopian, schools faced draconian penalties—eventually including closure or privatization—if every group in the school did not make adequate yearly progress. By 2008, 35% of the nation's public schools were labeled "failing schools," and that number seems sure to grow each year as the deadline nears.

Since the law permitted every state to define "proficiency" as it chose, many states announced impressive gains. But the states' claims of startling improvement were contradicted by the federally sponsored National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Eighth grade students improved not at all on the federal test of reading even though they had been tested annually by their states in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

Meanwhile the states responded to NCLB by dumbing down their standards so that they could claim to be making progress. Some states declared that between 80%-90% of their students were proficient, but on the federal test only a third or less were. Because the law demanded progress only in reading and math, schools were incentivized to show gains only on those subjects. Hundreds of millions of dollars were invested in test-preparation materials. Meanwhile, there was no incentive to teach the arts, science, history, literature, geography, civics, foreign languages or physical education.

In short, accountability turned into a nightmare for American schools, producing graduates who were drilled regularly on the basic skills but were often ignorant about almost everything else. Colleges continued to complain about the poor preparation of entering students, who not only had meager knowledge of the world but still required remediation in basic skills. This was not my vision of good education.

When charter schools started in the early 1990s, their supporters promised that they would unleash a new era of innovation and effectiveness. Now there are some 5,000 charter schools, which serve about 3% of the nation's students, and the Obama administration is pushing for many more.

But the promise has not been fulfilled. Most studies of charter schools acknowledge that they vary widely in quality. The only major national evaluation of charter schools was carried out by Stanford economist Margaret Raymond and funded by pro-charter foundations. Her group found that compared to regular public schools, 17% of charters got higher test scores, 46% had gains that were no different than their public counterparts, and 37% were significantly worse.

Charter evaluations frequently note that as compared to neighboring public schools, charters enroll smaller proportions of students whose English is limited and students with disabilities. The students who are hardest to educate are left to regular public schools, which makes comparisons between the two sectors unfair. The higher graduation rate posted by charters often reflects the fact that they are able to "counsel out" the lowest performing students; many charters have very high attrition rates (in some, 50%-60% of those who start fall away). Those who survive do well, but this is not a model for public education, which must educate all children.

NAEP compared charter schools and regular public schools in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009. Sometimes one sector or the other had a small advantage. But on the whole, there is very little performance difference between them.

Given the weight of studies, evaluations and federal test data, I concluded that deregulation and privately managed charter schools were not the answer to the deep-seated problems of American education. If anything, they represent tinkering around the edges of the system. They affect the lives of tiny numbers of students but do nothing to improve the system that enrolls the other 97%.

The current emphasis on accountability has created a punitive atmosphere in the schools. The Obama administration seems to think that schools will improve if we fire teachers and close schools. They do not recognize that schools are often the anchor of their communities, representing values, traditions and ideals that have persevered across decades. They also fail to recognize that the best predictor of low academic performance is poverty—not bad teachers.

What we need is not a marketplace, but a coherent curriculum that prepares all students. And our government should commit to providing a good school in every neighborhood in the nation, just as we strive to provide a good fire company in every community.

On our present course, we are disrupting communities, dumbing down our schools, giving students false reports of their progress, and creating a private sector that will undermine public education without improving it. Most significantly, we are not producing a generation of students who are more knowledgeable, and better prepared for the responsibilities of citizenship. That is why I changed my mind about the current direction of school reform.

Ms. Ravitch is author of "The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education," published last week by Basic Books.

**Jeff Jacoby: How separating school and state would pay off** /Dallas Morning News

Central to President Barack Obama's approach to education is a drive for uniform national standards in reading and mathematics.

The argument seems straightforward: The No Child Left Behind law enacted in 2002 required states to establish their own academic standards, but most of them – under pressure from teachers' unions and

school administrators' associations – set the bar quite low. The only way around the states' aversion to high standards, the Obama administration and others have concluded, is to impose uniform national standards, using the federal purse as leverage.

But if the goal is to have more American students get a successful education, it is far from clear that imposing a single set of benchmarks from above is the best strategy for getting there.

For one thing, the political resistance to rigorous academic standards that has been so effective at the state level is likely to be effective at the national level. The teachers' unions and administrators' organizations that oppose higher performance mandates are at least as influential on Capitol Hill as they are in the statehouses.

Moreover, the very nature of American society – a nation of 300 million comprising a multitude of ethnic, religious, social, and ideological traditions – argues against the imposition of one-size-fits-all education standards. There is no uniform answer to the question of what parents want most from their children's education.

"The greater the diversity of the people falling under a single schooling authority," Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute observes, "the greater the conflict, the less coherent the curriculum, and the worse the outcomes."

Anyone who called for legislation to establish mandatory national standards for television programming or restaurant menus would be laughed at: Americans don't think the government is competent to decide what shows they can watch on TV or what they can order for dinner when eating out. Is it any less risible to think that government knows best when it comes to your children's education?

Rather than centralizing even more government authority over the nation's schools, genuine reform would move in the opposite direction. It is parents – not local, state, or federal officials – who should control education dollars. School and state should be separated, with schools being funded on the basis of their ability to attract students and teach them well.

The primary responsibility for children's education should be vested in the same people who bear the primary responsibility for their feeding, housing, and religious instruction: their mothers and fathers.

More government control is not the cure for what ails American schools. The empowerment of parents is. No teachers' union, no school board, no secretary of education, and no president will ever love your children, or care about their schooling, as much as you do. In education as in so much else, high standards are important – far too important to hand off to the government.

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## **National News**

### **Court awards bullied student \$800,000/Detroit Free Press**

PEGGY WALSH-SARNECKI

DETROIT -- In what experts say could be a landmark decision, a Michigan school district was ordered last week to pay \$800,000 to a student who claimed the school did not do enough to protect him from years of bullying, some sexually tinged.

Last week's jury verdict against Hudson Area Schools puts districts on notice that it's not enough to stop a student from bullying another. There needs to be a concerted effort to stop systemic bullying, too.

Essentially, the federal court ruling says schools can be held responsible for what students do, if there is a pattern of harassment or if they don't do enough to provide a safe environment.

"This is going to have implications across the nation," said Glenn Stutzky, a Michigan State University instructor and an expert on bullying.

The district's attorney, however, says the verdict puts schools in the tricky position of being held liable for student behavior.

The district plans to appeal.

"You're never going to completely stop kids from being mean to kids," said Timothy Mullins of Giamarco, Mullins and Horton of Troy, Mich.

It started with name-calling in middle school and escalated as Dane Patterson entered high school. Some of the harassment was bullying, such as being shoved into lockers.

Other harassment was decidedly sexual in nature. He was called sexual insults, his locker and notebook were defaced with similar names, and worse. He and his parents say they reported the abuse, and yet it continued. Finally, in 10th grade, he was taunted in a locker room by a naked student rubbing against him.

That was the last straw for the Patterson family. In 2005, they sued Hudson Area Schools under Title IX, the Equal Opportunity in Education Act, using the sexually tinged bullying as the basis for a sexual harassment lawsuit.

Last week a jury in U.S. District Court told the school district to pay \$800,000 in damages to Patterson, now 19. Anti-bullying proponents say the case will send a message to all school districts that they are responsible for sexual harassment and, by extension, bullying.

For the Pattersons, however, the verdict is much simpler. It's vindication.

"I can't even put into words the pain and suffering that I went through for years," Dane Patterson said. "It's something that I would not want anyone else to go through."

While Patterson said he feels vindicated and is trying to move forward, his mother can't help but look back on their ordeal.

"I don't know how you get back eight years," Dena Patterson said. She said her son is so emotionally damaged by his experiences, he can't even go away to college and live in a dorm with other students. "We said it was worth standing up. We don't want another student, another parent to endure what we have seen."

Hudson schools, like most school districts, has an anti-bullying policy, and it took action against individual students when the bully could be identified. What the district failed to do is stop the pattern of abuse, said Terry Heiss, attorney for Patterson. For example, the school could have done more anti-bullying education, instituted more monitors or other measures to stop the pattern.

But this case makes it clear that having a policy, or even punishing individual bullies is not enough to stop a school from being liable, said Stutzky.

School officials will now have to show they were not indifferent, and that they made sure there wasn't a broader pattern of harassment beyond the individual case that went unchecked.

"If you only deal with things on an isolated case, that doesn't meet the standard for an effective response," Stutzky said.

But Mullins said the verdict leaves schools in a difficult situation.

"It sounds simple, but when you've got 500 kids and you're supposed to predict what any two or three or one are going to do in advance, well good luck," Mullins said. "If somebody writes dirty names on a boy's locker and you can't identify who it is, you can't punish the whole school."

The Patterson case initially was dismissed by the lower court in Detroit. But in October, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit reversed that decision, saying the family had demonstrated that there was enough of a question of whether the district's response was adequate to go forward with the trial.

Patterson was called pig or sexual insults and pushed into lockers, among other types of harassment, "on a daily basis" in sixth grade. When they complained, the family was sometimes told, "Kids will be kids; it's middle school," according to the court papers.

The harassment escalated in seventh grade, according to the lawsuit. Dane Patterson wanted to quit school, and his grades slipped.

Eighth grade was better. He began going to a resource room, a kind of study hall, to be counseled, and the lawsuit says the resource room teacher was helping him cope with the problems.

But ninth grade meant a change to high school. The Pattersons wanted their child to continue working with the resource room teacher, who had been successful the previous year. But the school district said no. The bullying continued in 10th grade, culminating in the locker room incident.

"It's a terrible thing, and I'm hoping with this verdict that schools will have to enforce stricter sexual harassment and bullying policies," Patterson said.

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