

# Dozens rally to support evidence-based school funding

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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**BRIGHTON** - Many educational administrators believe the passing of Illinois Senate Bill One (SB1) is required to get through this school year.

Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner is threatening to veto SB1 due to its possible effect on the pensions of Chicago teachers, but many superintendents and education administrators believe it is the only bill sponsoring evidence-based school funding, which has passed both the Illinois house and senate in the General Assembly. Six area superintendents joined together in the library at Brighton North Elementary School Tuesday afternoon to voice their collective support for the legislation, which some believe may be the only hope for their districts to financially get through the 2017-18 school year.

"Every child in Illinois deserves a high-quality education that sets them up for the American Dream," Southwestern School District Superintendent Brad Skertich said in a release. "In my district, and in too many other communities across Illinois, our schools are facing a crisis - the prospect of not being able to open their doors on time. The solution to this crisis is simple and one that's nearly complete: Governor Rauner needs to sign SB1 into law and fix our school's broken school funding system."

Carrollton School District Superintendent Dr. Kerry Cox said her district has been suffering from inadequate state funding for years. She said the Carrollton School District is as much as \$400,000 "in the red" due to the State of Illinois not paying its mandated categorical payments, which are exclusively used to reimburse the district for special education and transportation.

"We have made cuts due to proration and tax caps," Cox said. "We made another three and a half licensed positions this year, which is about seven percent of our licensed staff. You can't cut seven percent of your staff and not see effects from it."

Because of those cuts, Cox said the Carrollton School District is suffering from decreased music classes and a lack of a librarian. Without SB1, Cox warned such cuts will inevitably continue, adding the district only has enough in its reserves to last for 80-90 days without evidence-based school funding.

Dustin Day, Superintendent of the Waverly School District, which is located outside Jacksonville, Illinois, said his district is more fortunate than most, being it has enough in reserves to last more than 200 days without state assistance, but added the State of Illinois still owes it \$123,111.11.

"You remember numbers like that when it's money that's owed to you, and you're not getting it," Day said.

Despite having enough in reserves to last 211 days, Day said depleting those reserves would be something of a tragedy. He said they have taken years to accumulate those

sums, and he was not sure how long it would take him to refill them - if ever he could under the current state funding model.

The Calhoun School District has maybe a tenth of the days the Waverly School District has in its reserve, Superintendent Dr. Kate Sievers said. If evidence-based state funding is not passed, she said her district would have 22 days to shut its doors.

"For six years, we have all endured the proration of state funding, and we have all done a good job with it," she said. "We have worked very hard to keep this negative impact from becoming a full-blown crisis."

Currently, the state owes the Calhoun School District as much as \$166,000 for mandated categorical payments. That number is \$736,000 when calculated from 2012. Given that the district only has a yearly budget of \$3 million, those figures quickly add up to a problem.

"Clearly the children of Illinois have not been a focus to the politicians in Springfield," Sievers said. "We're demanding our leaders in Springfield work in the best interest of our children."

The Bethalto School District cut nearly the entirety of the Calhoun School District's budget from their own budget during a public school board meeting held in March 2017. During that meeting, Bethalto Superintendent Dr. Jill Griffin said \$2.3 million was cut, which equated to as many as 20 positions within the district - 11 of whom were teachers. It also established a \$2 million line of credit with a local bank.

"That's like putting the mortgage of your home on a credit card," Griffin said. "We had to establish it out of fear we wouldn't be able to make payroll. It is a direct result of the state not paying their mandated categoricals."

The conference was concluded by Dr. Dan Cox, the Superintendent of the Staunton School District.

"We don't have a spending problem," he said. "We have a revenue problem. We shouldn't have to be operating and scraping by at the bare minimum. We should be discussing raising the bar and investing in excellence. We shouldn't have to ask which choices are the least harmful."

Dan Cox said his district has reduced its amount of teachers by 19 percent, which has resulted in increased class sizes. Elementary school classes have increased to 29 students, and the junior high classes have increased to 30 students.

The Staunton School District has also cut support positions by 15 percent and administrative positions by 25 percent.