

Senate Bill 1 and local school districts

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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SPRINGFIELD - On Tuesday, Aug. 1, 2017, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner amended Senate Bill 1 (SB1) to remove what he described as a "bailout" for the Chicago Public Schools.

That bill, which many local school districts described as "the first bill for evidence-based school funding to have passed the Illinois General Assembly in six years," will

now return to the Illinois General Assembly for another round of approval, following Rauner's amendment to it. Many advocacy groups, lobbyists, educators and educational administrators are criticizing the governor's decision - saying it is using Illinois's students as leverage in an ongoing political battle in the Illinois state government.

"Governor Rauner's own administration has said he supports 90 percent of what's in this bill," Staunton Superintendent Dan Cox said in a release from Stand for Children Illinois, an advocacy group supporting SB1. "This obstinacy is exactly why we're not getting anything done in this state. Our elected leaders need to work together and compromise, especially when they support 90 percent of the bill.

"Despite the governor's blame games, the only person holding up funding for our schools is Bruce Rauner. The bill brings more money to our schools, gives local parents a better ability to decide how their money is best spent, and does so without picking winners and losers; no school district will ever lose a penny, and most will receive much more."

Rauner claims to support better school funding in Illinois, however. He established the Illinois School Funding Reform Commission more than a year ago. In a release, his

office described that group as "coming together on a bipartisan basis to study the way Illinois funds its public schools, and charting a path to a fairer and more equitable



system."

"It doesn't matter where you come from or who your family is," Rauner said in a release regarding SB1's recent amendment. "With a great education, you can go anywhere in life and be whomever you want to be. You can grow up, get a good job and provide for

your family. That's why the changes I have made to the education funding bill are so important. With my changes, our state ensures that enough resources flow to children in the poorest and most disadvantaged school districts across the entire state. And my changes ensure that the education funding system in our state is fair and equitable to all students in Illinois."

The Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFL) sent a release criticizing Rauner's amendatory veto of SB1 as well. Like Rauner's assertion he agreed with "90 percent" of SB1, IFL President Dan Montgomery said in a release he agrees with "a few things" Rauner said regarding SB1 Tuesday.

"Governor Rauner said a few things today with which we agree," Montgomery said in a release Tuesday. "He said education is a 'unifying issues,' and he is beyond disappointed that it has become a partisan fight. We are too, but let's not forget that it is Governor Rauner who vetoed a balanced, bipartisan budget to end a two-year crisis of his own making. And it is Governor Rauner who vetoed an education funding bill that would bring more equity and fairness to our schools for the first time in decades, because he 'only agrees with 90 percent of it.' Yes, it is disappointing that our children's future has become divisive, but it is the governor himself playing politics with their first day of school."

Rauner's amendatory veto would make the following changes to SB1 to "ensure an adequate and equitable school funding formula:

- Maintains a per-district hold harmless until the 2020-21 school year, and then moves to a per-pupil hold harmless based on a three-year rolling average of enrollment.
- Removes the minimum funding requirement. ("While the governor is committed to ensuring that the legislature satisfies its duty to fund schools, the proposed trigger of one percent of the overall adequacy target plus \$93 million artificially inflates the minimum funding number and jeopardizes Tier II funding.")
- Removes the Chicago block grant from the funding formula.
- Removes both Chicago Public Schools pension considerations from the formula: the normal cost pick-up and the unfunded liability deduction.
- Reintegrates the normal cost pick-up for Chicago Public Schools into the pension code "where it belongs," and "finally begins to treat Chicago like all other districts" with regards to the state's relationship with its teachers' pensions.
- Eliminates the PTELL and TIF equalized assessed value subsidies that allow districts to "continue under-reporting property wealth."
- Removes the escalators throughout the bill that automatically increase costs.
- Retains the floor for the regionalization factor, for the purposes of equity, and adds a cap, for the purposes of adequacy.

To find out how this will affect school districts within the Riverbend, EdGlen and northern Tri-County areas, stay tuned to future stories from Riverbender.com. Reporter Cory Davenport has sent a questionnaire regarding the future of school districts in the area to each area superintendent.