

Spotlight on Our Schools: Granite City

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GRANITE CITY - Schools in Illinois are currently in crisis mode following Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner's amendatory veto of Senate Bill 1 (SB1), which is the first bill for evidence-based school funding reform to pass both houses of the Illinois General Assembly in six years.

Rauner said he issued the amendatory veto to remove a "bailout" for Chicago Public Schools, however, it now must pass through both houses of the Illinois General

Assembly again to be approved. This puts school districts throughout the state on alert, because the first wave of general state aid usually comes to them in early-to-mid-August, and over the course of the last five years, many are in financial dire straits.

To see how the governor's choices are affecting local school districts, Riverbender.com sent an identical questionnaire to all superintendents in our coverage area. What follows is answers provided by Granite City Superintendent Jim Greenwald. These responses have not been edited.

1 - Would you say your district has been placed in dire financial straits due to the current state funding model?

Yes all public school districts are facing major challenges with no budget.

2 - If the current state funding model met its categorical payments and did not have proration, would it be sufficient? Why/why not?

Yes the problem is the State is always late and they owe millions they will never pay back.

3 - If this evidence-based school funding model is passed, what are the immediate benefits your district would see? What are some long-term potential benefits?

The SB1 would give Granite City 2.3 million dollars of new additional money and would create a consistent funding formula for the future.

4 - What is the largest expenditure in your district outside of payroll? How much is that impacted by pension debt?

The maintenance of facilities and resources for the students are very large expected expenses. Not impacted directly.

5 - If Rauner were to amend the bill to remove the "Chicago School Bailout," would it positively affect your district? Is that measure important to you?

It would create more money but that's not what this is all about. I want Chicago schools to be part of this. All schools in Illinois need help.

6 - How long could your district last without SB1 passing?

We would need some new money by Spring of 2018.

7 - How much in reserves does your district currently have? How long did it take to accumulate that?

We borrowed 5 million several years ago and have not touched it.

8 - How much is your district currently owed by the State of Illinois?

Proration over the past 5 years is well over 10 million.

9 - What are the regional school district offices and the Illinois State Board of Education doing to assist your district (if anything)?

They provide information.

10 - What measures has your district taken to alleviate the issues caused by current state funding in the last five years?

Major cuts ranging from attrition with jobs, as well as programs academic and extra curricular.

11 - Have your communities and parents been supportive during this funding crisis?

For the most part yes they understand. Some always have a negative slant toward public education but we cant control that.

12 - What do you think parents and the community need to know more about when making decisions based on public education? How is your district working to inform them?

I have sent them via email and social media numerous updates. I have also included them in meetings and seminars on the State issues. I have been very visible to and with media TV Radio and the newspapers.

13 - What is the "best case scenario" for this outcome?

The best case is for the politicians who make the decisions, to all come together not just some, and make a good fair move toward a more equitable funding system for all students in Illinois.

14 - What is the "worst case scenario" for this outcome?

Not enough adequate funding and the result would be the demise and sad watering down of public education. The lawmakers must think of the children.

15 - How high is the possibility of your school district being forced to shut its doors due to this current Springfield squabble?

Highly unlikely that this would cause us to shut down. I honestly believe there will be new money this fall sometime it may not be until the Sept - October November time frame. That's just the problem it is all so uncertain.