

Schools in the wake of Springfield compromise: Staunton

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STAUNTON - Previous to the passage of an augmented Senate Bill 1 (SB1), sponsored by Illinois Senator Andy Manar (D-Bunker Hill) Tuesday afternoon, Riverbender.com sent a survey to all superintendents in the coverage area to inquire about what the passage of the bill, which features \$75 million in tax credits toward donations to private school scholarships due to a compromise, will do for them.

The same set of questions were sent to each superintendent. These are the responses from Staunton School District Superintendent Dan Cox, who has been outspoken regarding the need for Illinois school funding reform, especially over the last year, as the first evidence-based school funding reform legislation in six years was passed by both houses of the Illinois General Assembly.

Questions also pertained to the first week of school, which has been occurring throughout the area.

What is your enrollment this year? Is that number higher or lower than average?

The district enrollment is 1,324 students. Our enrollment has remained stable at slightly over 1,300 students for the past several years. The enrollment last year at this same time was 1,320.

How much money is current owed to you by the state through both general state aid and mandated categoricals (which reimburse districts for mandates such as transportation and special education)?

Staunton schools are owed over \$500,000.

What do the missed payments from Aug. 10 and Aug. 20 (during bill negotiations in Springfield) mean to your district?

The State of Illinois and the Illinois General Assembly failed our students, schools and communities by not meeting their obligation to fund our schools on time in an adequate and equitable manner.

What does the newly reached "compromise" in the Illinois General Assembly (in which as much as \$75 million in tax credits may be offered to donations to private school scholarships) mean to your district?

The compromise was a historic victory for schools and students throughout Illinois. We finally have a school funding formula that is equitable and includes a roadmap to adequacy. While there are non-SB1 pieces in the compromise that are difficult for us, this is a major victory for schools.

Is this perfect policy? No, but it is very good policy and the core pieces of SB1 remain intact. I can confidently say our schools and students are better off today than they were yesterday.

We can finally say, "WE FIXED THE FORMULA!"

How much more money will your district receive if SB1 is finally signed into law? Is this enough?

We are awaiting the latest update from the Illinois State Board of Education since the passage of SB1947. Our most recent estimate is \$353,874.

Do you have faith the state funding system will improve if SB1 is signed into law?

For the first time, we have an evidence-based formula based on research to fund our schools in an equitable manner. The schools and students in greatest need will receive

dollars first and will set the schools in our state on a path to adequacy. This is certainly not an overnight fix, but all kids win with this formula.

What other challenges does your district face other than funding?

Our next greatest challenge will be implementing the rewrite of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Education Act.

What changes has this school year brought to your district?

Each year our schools, staff and students set out to become a better version of ourselves. We are always learning and striving to improve.