

IEA Testimony to the Illinois Senate Committee on Deficit Reduction

On behalf of the 133,000 members of the Illinois Education Association, I thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns for the FY10 Education budget for Elementary and Secondary Education.

Let's be clear; Illinois doesn't have a spending problem. Illinois has a revenue problem. Our state doesn't have the money to pay for current, necessary services.

Once such service is the providing of Special Education services in schools. Special Education is an obligation. It is not something a school district can opt out of. It is mandatory.

The state is supposed to reimburse districts for one-third the cost of providing services; that would mean the state would reimburse districts \$19,000 per recipient student.

Last year, the General Assembly approved the first reimbursement increase in a generation, by \$1,000, to a total of \$9,000. That still leaves districts picking up \$10,000 per student in mandatory costs.

This cost shifting has caused both overburdening of local property tax payers and led to shifting of resources away from other worthwhile programs in our schools.

Our point is this: reducing the state's deficit by continuing to refuse to meet the obligation to local school districts is unacceptable.

Funding for special education should be increased by basing the state's Special Education Personnel grant on the cost of special education employees and by increasing local school districts' tax-levying authority for special education.

IEA further believes the state student reimbursement rate for students placed in public alternative settings should be equal or higher to that of students placed in a private facility. **Current reimbursement rates should not be reduced to achieve this parity.**

Special education is not the only statewide education mandate.

The state will soon require statewide implementation of Response to Intervention or RTI. This is despite the fact that there is not sufficient funding for district level implementation, nor does the state board of education have the capacity to play a sufficiently supportive role in professional development and other support systems.

If current funding levels remain, we risk RTI becoming the latest underfunded mandate. The result will be poor implementation, costs passed on to local taxpayers, and bad rather than best education practice in implementing RTI.

As you look for the answers to the state revenue crisis, please keep in mind that we can't afford any more schemes or sleight-of-hand tricks like those past governors and legislatures gave us.

Many of the people in this room remember the great promise that the profits from the state lottery would boost education funding. Of course, that was untrue.

The lottery money went in the education fund pocket and was taken out of the general revenue pocket. The lottery has never generated an extra penny for public schools.

We cannot allow a similar "shell game" to be played with the with the stimulus money targeted for education and IDEA and Title 1 in particular.

To do so would be a cruel hoax upon the students, parents, and educators across the state and undermine the intent of the program, which is to preserve high quality public education for all students.

Again, thank you for your time. Doing the right thing is never easy and it often is expensive.

The people of Illinois are looking to this General Assembly to, at long last, come up with real solutions to these very real problems.