
Education: The Forgotten Cornerstone of Society

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To say the least, the education system of Illinois is in shambles and faces a crisis that must be recognized immediately by our state government. Numerous districts do not have adequate funds to effectively run their schools, let alone operate them. Districts are facing bankruptcies and massive deficits. The month of March was truly "March Madness" since hundreds of teachers have been given notices of their layoffs. Governor Blagojevich must focus on this issue since it is one of the most controversial and important issues facing the state of Illinois at this moment.

Currently in Illinois, the education system is experiencing a catastrophe since there is an immense shortage of funds. To start, more than one-third of the state's public schools face significant financial problems (Patterson and Tavella 2003). Of the state's 892 schools, some 300 were declared to have some degree of financial problems, up from only eleven last year (ibid.). According to state schools Superintendent Robert Schiller, more than 80 percent of the schools in the state have reported deficit spending (Kelly 2003). "Most districts are trying to survive and having to cut some of the lifeblood of what has made their district strong," said Schiller (Colindres 2003).

One of the most severely affected districts in Illinois is the Elgin-U46 district. This particular district is projecting more than \$50 million dollar deficit (Kelly 2003). In addition the district has sent layoff notices to 1,700 people, including 850 teachers (Waller 2003). Chairman of the State Board of Education, Ronald J. Gidwitz stated, "Without help from the state, Elgin has nowhere else to go but the classroom" (ibid.).

There is a need for an immediate response by Governor Blagojevich concerning this crucial matter. Illinois ranks 48th in state funding for public schools, even though the state constitution says it is the state's primary responsibility to support schools (ibid.). In the past, referendums have helped to increase budgets for school districts, but no longer seem to be effective. "Unfortunately, referendums don't work anymore," said Gidwitz (ibid.). It is essential for the governor to notice this and allocate more funding to school districts that desperately need it.

Gidwitz has launched an organization entitled "Students First Illinois" with the intent of sparking a movement to put more money for schools in the state budget. Gidwitz is suggesting that Governor Blagojevich should at least increase the state's education by \$518 million, which would make the total education budget \$6.7 billion for one year (ibid.). Representative Mike Boland (D-East Moline) also supports an increase in state education funding: "Our schools need billions, not millions" (Henry 2003).

A key starting point for the Blagojevich administration should be the reevaluation of the property tax as the main source for education funds. This method only creates an inequality in the level of education received by citizens of this state "The property tax is a terrible system to fund education," Boland said. "It is a system that causes great disparity in the money available to schools" (ibid.). In addition he noted that some poverty stricken areas of Illinois receive just \$4,500 per student for education, while wealthier areas may spend up to \$17,000 per student (ibid.).

An instrument that could be used by the state government to stimulate more funds for the education system is an expansion of riverboat gambling or even the creation of a state-owned casino. Another key problem faced by the state is that there is a \$5 billion deficit and at the same time Governor Blagojevich has pledged not to raise taxes (Patterson and Tavella 2003). Blagojevich has also stated that he will make education funding a priority: "Nothing is more important than how we educate children and it is a priority" (Colindres 2003). Clearly, it is not possible to be able to fix the education dilemma and decrease the deficit if taxes are not raised. Thus, the governor should consider raising taxes since it is the only guaranteed way to accumulate more funds.

William Butler Yeats once said "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." If immediate action is not taken, Governor Blagojevich and his administration shall have deprived thousands the opportunity to have their fire lit. Education is the foundation of society and for any infrastructure, if there is not a solid foundation, it shall not be as strong and effective as it ought to be. Education is, by far, the most pressing issue facing Governor Blagojevich and he must commit to address this problem.

Works Cited

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