

MCSO

McHenry County Superintendents' Organization

December 19, 2003

“A fundamental goal of the People of the State is the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities. The State shall provide for an efficient system of high quality public educational institutions and services...”
Illinois Constitution Article X, sec 1.”

On behalf of the McHenry County Superintendents Organization (MCSO), we wish to publicly thank Senator Pam Althoff, Representative Jack Franks and Representative Rosemary Kurtz for meeting with us to discuss challenging issues in funding Illinois public schools. Additionally, both their participation at the joint school district Town Hall meeting held at Johnsburg High School as well as at the School Funding meeting held in Woodstock demonstrates a clear commitment on their part to dialogue with school officials, village trustees, and residents regarding this issue. However, we feel that we are past the point of mere dialogue and that we must begin to address this issue in a manner that will result in some action.

We acknowledge that there is an increase in tax payer dissatisfaction with the manner in which Illinois public school districts are funded, ***particularly the heavy reliance on the property tax.*** We further acknowledge the State of Illinois' failure to uphold its primary responsibility to provide access to a high quality, free public education. There are nineteen public school districts in McHenry County including SEDOM, and there are twenty superintendents including the Regional Office of Education. As district and regional leaders, we represent the interests of 51,000 students who currently attend public schools in McHenry County. As such, we unanimously support the following initiatives and request our legislators to take action in support of them during upcoming legislative sessions.

1. Funding Reform

First and foremost is the need to address the disparity of funding between the richest and poorest districts. The quality of educational opportunity cannot be tied to the luck or misfortune of the area in which a family lives. Numerous proposals have been brought forward by previous state commissions to begin to alleviate this disparity. Whether it is a special session, or acceptance of

suggested alternatives, the issue of equitable funding and equitable educational opportunities must be addressed in any major funding reform.

Funding Reform may also mean looking at what primary sources are used to fund our schools and shift them appropriately. Illinois government relies considerably more on local tax to fund their school system than other Midwestern states. It may be time to shift that pattern. We urge our legislators not to shy away from this critical debate but look closely and responsibly at this alternative.

2. **Align impact fee calculations with current law.**
While understanding that this conversation has been in committee on previous occasions, this is the first year in which the law now allows impact fees to be used for construction. Hence, it is important that impact fee calculations reflect land, construction, and other increases uniquely attributable to growth.
3. **Support a twelve month statute of limitations on impact fee litigation against school districts.**
Attorney Flood includes substantial due process in the impact fee ordinances he has authored for municipalities. That component is much appreciated. The statute of limitations is another component that the MCSO endorses *and should be considered as impact fee legislation is revisited.*
4. **Remove from Social Security, IMRF, Life Safety, and Special Education from the tax cap.**
The MCSO understands the complexities associated with the Tax Extension Limitation Act and its impact on district operations. The removal of IMRF, Social Security, Life Safety, and Special Education from the tax cap would provide measurable financial relief to school districts while maintaining accountability to residents. Language will need to be carefully crafted to avoid unintended negative impacts as these costs are exempted.
5. **Re-establish matching fund grants for school construction/renovation and renew funding for the state Construction Grant Program.**
Many school districts have been the recipients of matching fund renovation/repair grants in the past. These grants have allowed school districts to keep their facilities in reasonable conditions. With the loss of these available monies, these same districts have had to forgo needed repair and maintenance projects to the detriment of the educational process. This is unacceptable. We urge our legislators to do all they can to re-establish this program, as well as the Construction Grant Program which has allowed for districts to build new sites and add on to existing sites. The incentive that monies would be available to districts that successfully support these building projects have helped to pass needed referendums.

6. Timely State Aide Payments

We strongly support legislation which would require that no later than February 1, of each year; the districts shall receive distributions of State Aide Payments. Failure to timely receive the State Aide Payments should result in each district receiving a late payment credit of 5% of the total State Aide for each district.

7. Support of "ECI" Legislation

We encourage legislators to support and pass pending legislation which fine tunes the formula under the Tax Cap. The legislation is known as the "ECI". The purpose is to refine the formula of CPI or 5%, whichever is less and replace "CPI" with the Federal Civilian Private Sector wage formula. The ECI more accurately reflects the increases in personnel costs incurred by the School District.

Dr. George Zimmer, Superintendent District 2

Dr. John Hill, Superintendent District 3

Dr. Rob Gough, Superintendent District 12

Dr. D. Williams Dodds, Superintendent District 15

Mr. Ronald Kruis, Superintendent District 18

Mrs. Mary Ann Kahl, Superintendent District 19

Dr. Jackie Crosby, Superintendent District 26

Dr. Joanne Fleshman, Superintendent District 36

Mr. Ron Miller, Superintendent District 47

Dr. Randy Gross, Superintendent District 50

Mr. Jerry Trickett, Superintendent District 154

Mr. Mike Mills, Superintendent District 155

Dr. Phil Hintz, Superintendent District 156

Mr. Wayne Riesen, Superintendent District 157

Dr. Stephen Swanson, Superintendent District 158

Mr. Marvin Carby, Superintendent District 165

Mrs. Ellyn Wrzeski, Superintendent District 200

Dr. Christy Chambers, SEDOM

Mr. Donald R. Englert, Regional Superintendent

Mr. Gene Goegloin, Assistant Regional Superintendent