

# State School News Service

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## FY 2011 ‘budget’ bill reaches Quinn

By Jim Broadway, Publisher  
State School News Service

At this writing nearly 500 bills that passed both the House and Senate remain pending Gov. Pat Quinn’s sign-or-veto decision. Among them is [HB 859](#), the so-called budget bill for FY 2011, which was sent to the governor just Wednesday morning.

As passed, the budget bill does little damage to education, but in the implementation act Quinn was given unprecedented power to cut spending lines. He indicated earlier in the year the ISBE lines face up to \$1.2 billion in cuts unless taxes are raised.

Taxes were not raised. The only potential relief for Illinois schools now appears to be a [pending federal bill](#) to prevent massive teacher layoffs nationwide. Washington watchers are optimistic, but the bill has a steep hill to climb, and strings will be attached.

Illinois would get more than \$950 million under the current version of the federal proposal. If it passes, the legislature would have to return to the Capitol to budget the money. Federal rules would require it to be used to prevent teacher layoffs in the fall.

[Quinn’s budget proposal](#) in March – based on no tax increase – called for a total 12.5% cut in ISBE lines, including losses relative to FY 2010 of \$628 million in General State Aid, \$402 million in mandated categorical program funding and severe reductions in non-mandated programs (\$54 million cut in early childhood, \$36 million in reading improvement and \$20 million in bilingual education, for example). If nothing else happens, such horrid cuts are likely.

## Data says Illinois easily could do better

Even as Illinois policymakers struggle to provide just basic services without going bankrupt, a non-profit data distributor called [The Taxpayers Network](#) sent its 2010 booklet to reporters nationwide.

The numbers make it clear. Illinois could remain one of the nation’s “low tax” states and still more than meet the basic needs of education, human services, public health and safety – with room to spare.

Illinois ranked 12th among the states in per capita [disposable income](#) (income minus taxes) in 2007, but was fairly average in percent of [citizens living at or below poverty](#) level. That suggests distribution of wealth is far more severe than in most other states.

Illinois ranked 4th in local [support for education](#) but 48th in state support in 2002-03 (the disparity has worsened since then). Our high reliance on property taxes raises Illinois to about average in total funding per student, but the distribution issue results in 20% of kids enjoying exceptional school opportunities, 30% or so near the national average and about half of Illinois students’ schooling woefully underfunded.

As the [Center for Tax and Budget Accountability](#) has consistently demonstrated, Illinois’ flat income tax rate, the nation’s lowest, coupled with the failure to apply the sales tax to services as other states do, ensures a growing structural deficit even if the goal is simply to maintain existing services.

After tax-pandering for years, legislators are afraid to solve the resulting accumulated \$13 billion deficit problem before the November elections. That’s why they’ve punted to Quinn in the FY 2011 budget.

## Quinn considers sub teacher revisions

[HB 5863](#) significantly revises statutory requirements for substitute teachers, allowing easier access to employment across ROE boundaries but making the applicant pay costs of criminal background checks.

As filed, the bill required ISBE to maintain a central database of substitute teacher certificate holders and related information, but that provision dropped out in an amendment. The bill was delivered to the governor on June 1. He has 60 calendar days from that date to decide to sign or veto it.

**School Councils:** Local School Councils serving each public school in Chicago (playing a role similar to that of elected school boards in other districts) will gain a 13th member – a non-teaching employee of each school – if Quinn signs [HB 6017](#).

Interests advocating for LSCs opposed the resulting erosion of the public members' influence, an effect of the bill, but it passed unanimously in the House and Senate and was delivered to Quinn June 2.

**Cooperative Schools:** [HB 6079](#) allows adjoining school districts meeting certain conditions to create cooperative grade schools, high schools or both. The bill includes joint agreement requirements and sets minimum enrollment criteria for this three-year pilot policy. Quinn received the bill June 1.

**Data Collection:** [HB 6092](#), codifying detailed criteria for longitudinal data to be collected by the Board of Higher Education, was sent to Quinn May 28. The "P20" data system is central to teacher assessments of the future, and to Illinois' Race to the Top effort.

**Endorsement:** [SB 2537](#), requiring candidates for a school business official endorsement to complete at least a six semester hour internship program at an appropriate university, reached Quinn on May 20.

**Fund Transfers:** [SB 3117](#), extending until June 30, 2013 a school board's authority to transfer revenue among district accounts, was sent to Quinn May 28. Without the extension, that authority for fiscal flexibility would expire next week.

## Pearson uses temps, any degree okay

Somehow it just doesn't seem to make sense that a teacher has to be highly trained and credentialed to instruct the student in language arts, but a guy with a diploma in aroma therapy – ink still wet – gets to decide if the teacher caused learning to happen.

A reader sent me a newspaper clipping. Pearson, the "most comprehensive provider of educational assessment products, services and solutions," was hiring "hundreds of college graduates to read and score student essays on a temporary basis."

Base pay, \$12.50 per hour; day shift, 8 to 4:30.

A bachelor's degree was required, "but it may be in any field." The only other requirement was that an applicant be able to prove his "eligibility to work in the U.S." No illegal aliens need apply.

You needn't bother applying either. The short test-scoring season is over. Hope they had a few scorers with some actual familiarity with writing. Having a green card does not, by itself, guarantee much.

**It's a dumb system** whose only effect is to privatize an educational function. Amateur scoring assesses nothing. And an essay score is not an assessment of a student anyway – it assesses the teacher.

We reached this sad state because of the distrust of educators spawned by *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 and nurtured by the corporate community ever since. Before that, teachers graded students. Principals graded teachers. Superintendents graded principals.

Perhaps more than that would be helpful. If so, a random sampling of students' essays, assessed by actual educators who are paid a decent stipend for the work, would yield results with some credibility.

The current system is just corporate welfare, as past experience has shown. The amateur scorers might as well skip reading and assign the first letter grade that comes to mind. They are nearly that arbitrary.

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