



August 8, 2017

Let's Finally Fix Public Education

As regular readers of this column may have noticed, this is the fourth column in a row that addresses education in Illinois, and there is a reason for this. If Governor Rauner is serious about making Illinois a place to relocate, start, or grow a business, having the best public education system in the country should be his priority. In Illinois, we now have a budget for the Department of Corrections, but not for the Department of Education. I urge Governor Rauner to work with the General Assembly and lead with an honest and constructive plan to turn around Illinois' school systems and make Illinois THE leader when it comes to the best possible public education in America. This is our chance to change the course of students' lives and eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline - the time is now.

The failure to better fund public education will not attract new families or business people to Illinois. Illinois must improve our education system if we want to be competitive and attractive for new families and business to want to make Illinois home. Illinois currently employs the least equitable education funding system in the country, coming in last place among all states in the amount of state funding contributed to its public schools. And because education funding is built primarily on local property taxes, it also has the nation's largest gap between its wealthy and poor school districts. What better way to invest taxpayers' hard-earned dollars than to have a strong and equitable public school education system, from pre-K through high school?

Providing quality education for all people would turn Illinois around. The only true turnaround agenda for Illinois is public education. Fixing Illinois' public education trumps reforms like term limits or workers compensation. If people are educated, it actually creates a cost savings for all tax payers – think of the cost savings by educating people who will be taxpayers rather than spending money on incarceration.

Springfield not leading by good example. I am disappointed that Gov. Rauner vetoed the only budget bill on the table to fund education in Illinois. I understand he has the constitutional right to veto bills. If I were "hypothetically" the governor and if I didn't agree with the plan on the table to fund education, my veto would have been followed by a bill that I felt was better and fairer. Vetoing a bill and offering only criticism of the plan is not a step in the right direction.

Illinois has over 2 million students in public schools. As of July 2017, there were 852 public school districts: 368 elementary districts, 97 high school districts, 386 unit districts, and one Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice district. Chicago has almost 400,000 of the 2 million students attending public schools. The veto without a plan B is a blow to 2,000,000 young boy, girls and young adults. We need to work to override the governor's veto of SB1 and get on the path to better fund education in Illinois.

Now, if we can't override the governor's veto, let's work on a new bill to fund public education. While we are negotiating, I will fight for free public transportation for all students in Illinois. The cost of public transportation continues to increase along with all of the other costs of living and the new taxes in Illinois, but work wages remain the same. In most rural school districts, students don't have to pay extra to ride their school bus to school. In

Chicago, the city controls both Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), so for Chicago it seems that this would be easy. After all, there are so many reasons to support free rides for students in Chicago. Most students in CPS travel outside of their communities to a school that meets their needs. I will work to make it happen on the state level for all students. Families just can't afford the additional cost, taking into account all of the other financial pressures placed on them from many units of government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District