



## **Position Statement on Education Reform**

### **Preamble**

One of the most vexing challenges Illinois must address is the funding of education. Mayors clearly recognize that a good education system is important to the quality of life in their communities and also is the key to Illinois' long-term economic competitiveness.

The Illinois Constitution gives the State "primary responsibility" for funding the cost of public education. Illinois currently covers only 34 percent of this cost, which ranks it 49<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of the percentage of state funding provided for education.

The "primary responsibility" for funding the cost of education has fallen instead on local property taxpayers. School districts in Illinois currently derive 58 percent of their funds from local property taxes. Illinois ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation behind only the State of Nevada for its reliance on local taxes to fund education.

Any proposal to modify the sources of education funds must recognize the value of revenue sources which are stable despite variance in economic conditions.

The disparity in the current system of funding education in Illinois is unfair to the children of Illinois who deserve an equal opportunity to a quality education.

The issues of funding reform and fiscal and performance accountability reform are not mutually exclusive as some might suggest. They need to be pursued on parallel paths.

The challenge of education funding has been discussed for over three decades. While many attempts have been made to reform the system, they have all failed because there has not been enough support for them.

City of Chicago · DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference · Lake County Municipal League · Metro West Council of Governments  
McHenry County Council of Governments · Northwest Municipal Conference · South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association  
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The Mayors of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus propose that a broad-based consensus needs to be built around a set of goals before a specific solution is developed. These goals should guide the thinking as a solution is crafted. They are as follows:

**Short Term Goals**

- All local school mandates from the State that require per pupil costs in excess of the foundation level shall be funded by the State of Illinois. State funding for these mandates shall be in addition to, and not in place of, State funding for core curriculum costs.
- The State of Illinois shall work together with local boards of education to improve the system by which schools must demonstrate that they have employed effective fiscal accountability and worked to improve their management practices and control increases in costs with a special look to costs outside the classroom.
- The State of Illinois shall work together with local boards of education to require schools to demonstrate that they have employed effective academic and fiscal accountability and performance measurements.
- When discussing accountability, it should not be viewed as a “one size fits all” proposition. Neither individual school districts nor individual students can be held equally accountable when their challenges are not equal.
- One of the failings of the accountability system in Illinois has been its lack of continuity. Our educational standards, testing methodologies and the systems for measuring performance are constantly changing. The State of Illinois needs to develop a plan and stick with it.
- The State of Illinois’ current accountability system focuses on the school or school district, but not on the most important target, our children. The ISAT test is only valid as a measurement of performance when it is applied to larger groups, not to an individual. It does not track student performance as a child moves from one district to another. The accountability system needs to focus as much on the student as it does on the school.

**Long Term Goals**

- The State of Illinois shall fund at least 51 percent of the cost of funding education level in a way that guarantees an increase in education funding from year to year and that reduces, but does not eliminate the reliance on the local property tax as a source of funding. Funding reform shall not diminish the amount of state support currently received by any school district.
- A significant portion of all new state revenues shall be directed first to provide greater state funding to under-funded school districts by raising the per pupil foundation level to \$5,665 in current dollars. This recommended foundation level should be adjusted each year by the rate of inflation.