



Richard M. Daley
Mayor, City of Chicago
Founding Chair

Thomas G. Adams
President, Village of Green Oaks
Executive Board Chair

Gayle A. Smolinski
Mayor, Village of Roselle
Executive Board Vice Chair

June 23, 2006

Dear Editor:

Last month, Governor Blagojevich introduced a multi-faceted plan for reforming Illinois schools. As representatives of the 272 Mayors in the Chicago region, we appreciate that the Governor is acknowledging that education is a priority issue in the state of Illinois. Mayors across the state have seen first-hand that our education system needs to be improved, and a new funding mechanism needs to be put into place. While many of the Governor's ideas have merit, and should be included in the discussion, we are concerned that there is still a need to address the long-term problems created by an antiquated funding system.

Since 2003, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus' Education Reform Committee has been meeting to discuss education-related issues at the local, regional and state levels. We agree with Governor Blagojevich that initiatives to improve struggling students' performance, provide up-to-date textbooks and classroom materials, increase parental involvement, and enhance special education funding, among others, are imperative. However, all of these initiatives require significant financial support. Our schools will not only need long-term, stable funding sources for these programs, but for the programs and mandates for which they are currently responsible.

The issues involved in reforming Illinois' education system require thoughtful consideration. Over the last three years, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, an organization representing the 272 communities in the six-county Chicago region, has created its education principles, which are based on the twin pillars of funding reform and school accountability. While changing the funding available to schools and ensuring a stable source of such funds is important, schools must also be held to standards which demonstrate that they have employed fiscal accountability and worked to improve management practices and control costs. We must also create long-term, sustainable reforms in the current system that reduce our reliance on the property tax to fund public education and eliminate the inequities in the quality of education that exist between property poor and wealthier districts. The quality of a child's education should not depend on where he or she resides.

To address these issues, the Caucus recently called for the creation of a task force to review and evaluate the fiscal and performance accountability of Illinois' school districts and individual schools. We joined with Democratic and Republican state legislators to sponsor HJR 119. This Resolution passed the House on a unanimous vote. It was met with strong support in the Illinois Senate. Unfortunately the spring session ended before a final vote could occur in the Senate. However, thanks to the high level of interest in the Resolution, we plan to go ahead and form the Accountable Schools Task Force this summer and include interested members of the Legislature.

In conclusion, the task of creating a strong education system across the State of Illinois is one which policy leaders have struggled with for years. With the creation of a dependable, increasing revenue source, and the implementation of standards to ensure that public funds are being used wisely, we can provide a quality education to all Illinois children and significantly reduce our over-reliance on the property tax.

City of Chicago · DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference · Lake County Municipal League · McHenry County Council of Governments ·
Metro West Council of Government · Northwest Municipal Conference · South Suburban Mayors and Managers Association
Southwest Conference of Mayors · West Central Municipal Conference · Will County Governmental League

177 North State Street, Suite 500, Chicago, Illinois 60601
Tel: 312.201.4505 Fax: 312.553.4355
www.mayorscaucus.org

With election season upon us, the gubernatorial candidates will be presenting their education positions and plans. We as local officials look forward to participating in any and all discussions that arise regarding improving the state of education in Illinois.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular box containing a white handwritten signature that reads "Thomas G. Adams".

Thomas G. Adams
Mayor, Village of Green Oaks
Executive Board Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard M. Daley".

Richard M. Daley
Mayor, City of Chicago
Founding Chairman

|s| Edward Schock

Edward Schock
Mayor, City of Elgin
Education Reform Committee Chairman