

Senate President John J. Cullerton 2016 City Club prepared remarks

IT'S BEEN 7 YEARS SINCE I STOOD HERE AS THE NEW SENATE PRESIDENT.

I'M PROUD OF WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED.

WE REMOVED A CORRUPT GOVERNOR FROM OFFICE, ABOLISHED THE DEATH PENALTY, OFFICIALLY RECOGNIZED MARRIAGE EQUALITY, REFORMED PENSIONS FOR NEW HIRES, KEPT CONVENTIONS COMING TO MCCORMICK PLACE AND CONTROLLED MEDICAID SPENDING.

PRESENTED WITH PROBLEMS, WE'VE RISEN TO THE TASK TO MAKE ILLINOIS A BETTER STATE THAT RECOGNIZES EVERYONE'S RIGHTS AND PROVIDES PATHWAYS TO EXCELLENCE.

BUT THERE'S MORE TO DO.

THERE'S AN INJUSTICE WE'VE TOLERATED TOO LONG. ONE THAT CRUSHES DREAMS, STIFLES GROWTH AND KEEPS US, AS A STATE, FROM MOVING FORWARD.

IT IS ILLINOIS' SYSTEM OF FUNDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS: A SYSTEM THAT SHACKLES POOR COMMUNITIES TO POOR EXPECTATIONS WHILE REWARDING THE AFFLUENT WITH EVEN GREATER RESOURCES.

IT CAN BE TOLERATED NO LONGER.

AT A TIME WHEN WE SEEM TO LABEL EVERY PROBLEM A CRISIS, LET ME BE CLEAR:

OUR BROKEN SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA IS THE DEFINING CRISIS OF OUR TIME. FIXING IT IS THE TURNAROUND OUR STATE TRULY NEEDS.

TODAY, I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE SYSTEM, POINT TO STATES THAT APPEAR TO DO IT RIGHT AND OUTLINE WAYS TO MAKE EDUCATION BETTER AND MORE EQUITABLE HERE.

OUR STUDENTS, PARENTS, TEACHERS AND TAXPAYERS ARE TIRED OF THE BICKERING, TIRED OF THE IMPASSE. THEY'RE LOOKING FOR LEADERS WITH THE COURAGE TO STEP BEYOND THE STATUS QUO AND DO WHAT'S RIGHT. TODAY, I'M ASKING MY COLLEAGUES TO TAKE THAT STEP.

OUR PROBLEMS ARE NOT A SECRET. FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS THE SYSTEM HAS FESTERED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT.

EVERY MORNING, ACROSS ILLINOIS, SCHOOLCHILDREN LEARN, TEACHERS TEACH AND PRINCIPALS LEAD. BUT THE DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY DO NOT OPEN AS WIDE FOR STUDENTS IN SOME SCHOOLS AS IN OTHERS, EVEN AS OUR EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS RISE EQUALLY ACROSS ALL SCHOOLS.

IN BERWYN, A KINDERGARTNER BUNDLES UP FOR CLASS BECAUSE HIS AGING SCHOOL CAN DROP BELOW 40 DEGREES EVEN WITH THE HEAT ON, AND HE WONDERS IF HIS FAVORITE BOOKS WILL GET RUINED LIKE THE LAST TIME THE PIPES BURST AND FLOODED THE SCHOOL LIBRARY.

IN SANDOVAL, A TOWN ABOUT 100 MILES SOUTH OF SPRINGFIELD, THIRD-GRADERS HEAD TO A SCHOOL WHERE DWINDLING RESOURCES MEAN NO ART CLASSES OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS. THERE'S NO SCHOOL LIBRARIAN TO HELP FIND BOOKS OR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER TO OFFER SUPPORT.

AND IN EAST AURORA THE SCHOOL'S SOCIAL WORKERS SERVE 900 STUDENTS EACH. MORE THAN HALF OF EAST AURORA'S 1,100 INCOMING FRESHMAN READ BELOW GRADE LEVEL. THE TASK OF IMPROVING SCORES FALLS TO JUST TWO READING SPECIALISTS.

THESE SITUATIONS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CAPACITY OF OUR KIDS OR THE CALIBER OF OUR EDUCATORS, AND EVERYTHING TO DO WITH HOW WE FUND OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

OUR STATE HAS THE MOST INEQUITABLE SYSTEM OF SCHOOL FINANCE IN THE COUNTRY. WE GIVE LESS TO THE STUDENTS WHO NEED MORE AND COVER BARELY A THIRD OF THE TOTAL COST OF PUBLIC EDUCATION WHEN MOST STATES COVER HALF.

LET ME PUT IT THIS WAY, IF THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE OPERATED LIKE OUR SCHOOL FUNDING SYSTEM, THE SUPER BOWL CHAMP WOULD BE GUARANTEED THE TOP DRAFT PICK.

IT'S FUNDAMENTALLY UNFAIR.

I BELIEVE THAT OUR STUDENTS – ALL OF THEM – DESERVE BETTER.

PROVIDING IT, HOWEVER, WILL NOT BE EASY.

THERE'S A REASON WHY THE CURRENT SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA HAS BEEN IN PLACE FOR TWO DECADES. IT'S HARD TO CHANGE AN ENTRENCHED STATUS QUO. IT REQUIRES TRUE, DEDICATED LEADERSHIP.

THE QUESTION IS WHETHER TODAY'S LEADERS ARE UP TO THE TASK.

NEARLY 20 YEARS AGO, GOVERNOR JIM EDGAR STAKED HIS LEGACY ON CORRECTING THIS WRONG. HE CAME WITHIN A SINGLE VOTE OF DELIVERING A COMPLETE OVERHAUL OF SCHOOL FUNDING. BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR GOVERNORS IN ILLINOIS HISTORY WAS STYMIED BY SELFISH REGIONAL POLITICS WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY.

NO GOVERNOR SINCE – NOT RYAN, BLAGOJEVICH, NOR QUINN – EVEN BOTHERED TO TRY.

SO I’M HERE TO ISSUE A CHALLENGE TO GOVERNOR RAUNER.

SINCE HE WANTS TO TURNAROUND ILLINOIS, THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE TO START THAN THE STATE’S SYSTEM FOR FUNDING PUBLIC SCHOOLS. THERE IS NO WORSE STATUS QUO.

SHOULDN’T ALL OF OUR CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES REGARDLESS OF ZIP CODE OR TAX BRACKET?

SHOULDN’T OUR SYSTEM PRIORITIZE GETTING RID OF HURDLES THAT PREVENT CHILDREN FROM GETTING A QUALITY EDUCATION?

THE WORLD HAS CHANGED OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS. SHOULDN’T OUR SCHOOL FUNDING SYSTEM CHANGE WITH IT?

LOOK AROUND. THIS ROOM IS FILLED WITH SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE. IS THERE ANYONE HERE WHO DOESN’T OWE HIS OR HER SUCCESS TO EDUCATION?

THE STRENGTH OF OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS IS VITAL FOR THE CIVIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL STRENGTH OF OUR STATE. UNFORTUNATELY, OUR STATE ISN’T DOING SO WELL.

THE PERFORMANCE GAP THAT DIVIDES OUR RICH AND POOR STUDENTS, AS WELL AS OUR STUDENTS OF COLOR, RANKS AMONG THE WORST IN THE NATION.

YOU BEGIN TO SEE IT IN LAGGING 4TH GRADE READING SCORES AMONG LOW-INCOME STUDENTS. FROM THERE, THOSE STUDENTS INCREASINGLY FALL BEHIND THEIR PEERS AT SCHOOLS WITH GREATER RESOURCES. NATIONALLY, WE RANK A DISMAL 42ND IN TERMS OF THE PERFORMANCE GAP IN READING SCORES AMONG THESE STUDENTS .

OUR STATE FALLS AMONG THE BOTTOM 10 WHEN IT COMES TO THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE STUDENTS .

AND WHILE WE SUFFER THE STATUS QUO, OTHER STATES ARE MOVING THE NEEDLE FURTHER AND FASTER THAN WE ARE.

WE KNOW THAT STUDENTS IN DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES ARE JUST AS CAPABLE OF ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AS THOSE FROM THE BEST NEIGHBORHOODS. WE JUST NEED TO INVEST A LITTLE MORE TO MAKE UP THE DIFFERENCE. AND THE EARLIER WE DO IT, THE BETTER.

JUST ABOUT EVERYBODY ELSE GETS THIS.

LOOK AT OHIO.

OHIO IS THE POLAR OPPOSITE OF WHAT WE'RE DOING FOR SCHOOLS HERE. OHIO INVESTS HEAVILY IN LOWER-INCOME STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS BECAUSE OFFICIALS THERE UNDERSTAND THE INVESTMENT PAYS OFF.

THE HIGHER THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION, THE LOWER THE RELIANCE ON GOVERNMENT SOCIAL PROGRAMS, THE LOWER THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, THE HIGHER THE WAGES AND THE MORE ATTRACTIVE YOUR SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND STATE BECOME.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST OHIO.

EVERY STATE DOES IT BETTER THAN US.

FOR EVERY DOLLAR OHIO SPENDS ON STUDENTS, \$1.22 IS INVESTED IN LOW-INCOME STUDENTS. ON THE FLIPSIDE, FOR EVERY DOLLAR ILLINOIS SPENDS EDUCATING STUDENTS, ONLY 81 CENTS GOES TOWARD LOW-INCOME STUDENTS.

I THINK IT'S TIME TO TURN THAT AROUND.

REMEMBER, GOVERNOR RAUNER VETOED ALL OF OUR BUDGET PROPOSALS SAVE ONE.

HE SIGNED THE PUBLIC EDUCATION BUDGET, AND HE DESCRIBES IT AS HIS GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT EVEN THOUGH NOT A SINGLE REPUBLICAN LAWMAKER VOTED FOR IT. HE CHAMPIONS WHAT HE CALLS "WORLD-RECORD" SPENDING FOR ILLINOIS SCHOOLS.

BUT WE HAVE TO ASK OURSELVES TWO QUESTIONS:

HOW MUCH ARE WE GOING TO SPEND ON EDUCATION?

AND HOW ARE WE GOING TO SPEND IT?

IF THE MONEY ISN'T GOING TO HELP STUDENTS IN NEED, IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER HOW MUCH WE SPEND.

THAT'S WHY OUR FUNDING FORMULA NEEDS TO BE OVERHAULED.

THE CURRENT SYSTEM TENDS TO EXACERBATE RATHER THAN ALLEVIATE PROBLEMS. THAT'S HOW WE CAN SPEND RECORD AMOUNTS ON SCHOOLS AND STILL RANK AMONG THE LOWEST IN THE NATION IN TERMS OF THE STATE'S SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION FUNDING.

IT RESULTS IN SOME SCHOOLS BUILDING UP RESERVES LARGE ENOUGH TO COVER YEARS WORTH OF SPENDING WHILE OTHERS COULD BARELY LAST THE WEEK.

SO, HOW DO WE CREATE A NEW FUNDING FORMULA TO BETTER SERVE TODAY'S KIDS?

THE NEW APPROACH SHOULD REFLECT SOME KEY PRINCIPLES:

- **STATE RESOURCES SHOULD GO TO SCHOOL DISTRICTS BASED ON THE NEEDS OF THEIR STUDENTS WITH MORE FUNDS TO SUPPORT KIDS WHO WE KNOW – FROM RESEARCH AND OUR OWN COMMON SENSE – NEED EXTRA SUPPORT. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT KIDS WHO LIVE IN POVERTY, HAVE SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS OR WHO ARE JUST LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.**

THE CHALLENGES CONFRONTING EAST ST. LOUIS, WHERE 99 PERCENT OF KIDS ARE POOR, ARE DIFFERENT THAN IN LAKE FOREST, WHERE LESS THAN 4 PERCENT OF KIDS ARE LOW-INCOME. LET'S CREATE A SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA THAT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT.

- **FUNDS SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED THROUGH A SINGLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD MODEL. SPECIAL DEALS ARE OVER. THIS WILL BE WELCOME RELIEF FOR DISTRICTS THAT CONFRONT ONE BUREAUCRATIC HURDLE AFTER ANOTHER.**

- **WE NEED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S ABILITY TO SUPPORT LOCAL SCHOOLS WITH LOCAL FUNDS.**

AND,

- **ACCOUNTABILITY NEEDS TO FOLLOW THESE DOLLARS.**

GUIDED BY THESE KEY PRINCIPLES, A NEW SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA WOULD LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD THAT HAS GOTTEN SO OFF-KILTER.

NOW CLEARLY NO ONE WANTS ANY SCHOOL DISTRICT TO LOSE MONEY. WE ALL UNDERSTAND THAT DOLLARS FOR SCHOOLS ARE DOLLARS FOR STUDENTS.

BUT LET'S ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WHILE THERE MAY BE CONCERNS ABOUT WINNERS AND LOSERS IN A NEW SYSTEM, THERE ARE WINNERS AND FAR TOO MANY LOSERS IN THE CURRENT SYSTEM.

WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO DITHER WHILE SOME DISTRICTS ARE FUNDED AT DOUBLE AND TRIPLE THE STATE AVERAGE WHILE OTHERS HAVE TO CONVERT MAINTENANCE CLOSETS INTO ART ROOMS AND CUT WORLD LANGUAGE, ART AND TECHNOLOGY.

WHY SHOULD A HIGH-SCHOOLER IN ELGIN GET A \$12,000-A-YEAR EDUCATION WHILE, 30 MILES AWAY, A HIGH-SCHOOLER IN NILES GETS A \$22,000-A-YEAR

PUBLIC EDUCATION EVEN AS ELGIN TAXES ITSELF 22 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE STATE AVERAGE FOR SIMILAR DISTRICTS?

IT IS NOT LOST ON ME THAT WE ARE SITTING IN CHICAGO AS I SPEAK ABOUT AN ILLINOIS SCHOOL FUNDING FIX. YOU MIGHT WONDER WHAT ALL THIS COULD MEAN FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN CHICAGO.

CHICAGO NEEDS HELP, QUICKLY. THAT MUCH IS CLEAR.

THE SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA WE ARE PROPOSING COULD HELP --- NOT RESOLVE, BUT HELP --- SOME OF THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGES.

HERE'S HOW:

FIRST, A SINGLE SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA THAT RECOGNIZES THE NEEDS OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS WOULD BENEFIT CHICAGO JUST AS IT WOULD BERWYN, CAIRO AND EAST ST. LOUIS – ALL OF WHICH HAVE A STUDENT POVERTY RATE AT NEARLY 90 PERCENT OR HIGHER . DISTRICTS WITH THE SAME LEVEL OF NEED WOULD BE TREATED THE SAME. AGAIN, ANY SPECIAL DEALS ARE GONE.

SECOND, THE CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT IS THE ONLY DISTRICT IN ILLINOIS THAT PAYS ALMOST ALL OF ITS OWN PENSION COSTS. THAT TAKES LOCAL DOLLARS OUT OF LOCAL CLASSROOMS.

THIS YEAR, ILLINOIS IS SPENDING \$2,266 PER STUDENT ON PENSIONS IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS OUTSIDE CHICAGO.

IN CHICAGO, THE STATE SPENDS \$31 PER STUDENT. LOCAL TAXPAYERS PICK UP THE REST.

IT'S TIME TO TREAT THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN CHICAGO LIKE EVERY OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT IN ILLINOIS. PENSION PARITY MUST BE PART OF THE NEW FORMULA.

SPEAKING OF CHICAGO ...

REMEMBER THAT WORLD-RECORD EDUCATION BUDGET THE GOVERNOR SIGNED? IT INCREASED SCHOOL SPENDING BY \$265 MILLION STATEWIDE.

I WAS RECENTLY IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS, AND I ASKED A GROUP HOW MUCH OF THAT THEY THOUGHT WENT TO CHICAGO.

***"OH, IT HAD TO BE ALL OF IT,"* THEY SAID.**

BACK HERE IN MY DISTRICT, I ASKED THE SAME QUESTION.

THE RESPONSE: *"WHATEVER IT WAS, IT WASN'T ENOUGH."*

YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW MUCH MORE CHICAGO SCHOOLS GET OUT OF THAT EXTRA \$265 MILLION?

THEY GET MINUS \$60 MILLION DOLLARS.

DOES ANYONE HERE THINK THAT IMPROVES EDUCATION FOR CHICAGO STUDENTS?

THAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH THE CURRENT FORMULA. THE DOLLARS AREN'T GOING WHERE WE KNOW THEY ARE NEEDED.

AND WE KNOW CHICAGO KIDS CAN PERFORM AS WELL AS ANY.

ACCORDING TO A RECENT U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NATIONAL REPORT CARD, CHICAGO STUDENTS IMPROVED IN MATH AND READING FASTER THAN OTHER URBAN SCHOOLS AND THE NATION AT LARGE.

THAT'S GREAT. SO WHY IS THERE A SENSE OF SURPRISE?

IS IT BECAUSE WE ALL KNOW THAT TOO MANY OF THESE STUDENTS FACE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE ODDS AND OFTEN LACK THE BASIC RESOURCES NEEDED TO ATTAIN EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS?

OK, THEN SHOULDN'T WE DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

CHICAGO STUDENTS ARE OUR STUDENTS.

WE HAVE THE SAME RESPONSIBILITY TO THEM THAT WE HAVE TO EVERY PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT IN ILLINOIS.

WE CANNOT APPLAUD THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THEN TURN OUR BACK ON THEIR SHORTCOMINGS.

THEIR TURNAROUND AGENDA IS OUR TURNAROUND AGENDA AND NEEDS TO BE ILLINOIS' TOP PRIORITY.

I HOPE YOU WILL JOIN ME IN MAKING THAT HAPPEN.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK HERE TODAY.

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