

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# Impact of State Budget on D.99

**Dr. Nancy Kupka, president of District 99 Board of Education**

State legislators in Springfield are continuing to negotiate a budget for Illinois. A bundle of bills, dubbed "The Grand Bargain," is expected to be debated in the coming weeks. Many of these bills may impact education funding. I want you to be aware about this pending legislation, and of the possible impact to District 99 and our students at Downers Grove North High and South High.

We are keeping a close eye on three bills in particular:

- **Senate Bill 1: School Funding Reform:** This bill would provide more funds to schools that demonstrate greater financial need.

This means that state funding to District 99 would remain relatively flat for the next five years or more. Fortunately, we have been preparing for this possibility and due to our prudent financial management, we believe District 99 can withstand this change in state funding over the near term. However, given the impacts of other pending bills below, we are deeply concerned.

- **Senate Bill 11: Pension Reform:** This bill would make significant changes to pension laws. It would



shift the pension liability from the state onto local taxpayers as well as make other sweeping changes to shed costs that were previously a part of the state's budget. Depending on the final language, the cost to District 99 taxpayers would be as much as \$3 million per year.

- **Senate Bill 13: Property Tax Freeze:** This bill would eliminate the increase for inflation that District 99 is permitted to levy for each year. Indeed, inflationary increases have been the only source of increases to District 99's levy over the past several years. In this regard, the Property Tax Cap is working as it was originally proposed. While a taxpayer in District 99 with a \$300,000 market value home would save about \$37 annually in taxes paid to District 99, District 99 would be unable to levy about \$1.6 million in

inflationary increases in the first year alone. Over time, District 99 would not be able to keep pace with the inflationary increases of its expenses, and District 99 would be required to cut services in order to keep a balanced budget. It is estimated that a Property Tax Freeze would cause a 10 percent reduction in District 99's services over the next five years. This would have a substantial impact on the quality of education that we can offer our students at District 99.

In late February, I traveled to Springfield alongside fellow Board member Mike Davenport to represent District 99 and we met with several legislators. District 99 Superintendent Dr. Hank Thiele and District 99 Controller Mark Staehlin also attended. We communicated our concerns and highlighted how the various bills might impact our students, schools and programs.

As we do in all of our work at District 99, we kept the focus on the student.

District 99 is a leading school district, and one of the reasons why we are is because of our strong finances. In the weeks ahead, we will be continuing to prepare and adapt to what we are able to control, while closely monitoring the conversations and debates in Springfield.