

The latest session of Illinois' General Assembly brought both progress and setbacks. We made progress on several IFT initiatives, while others failed to complete the entire legislative process. All of that will be profiled here. Let's begin with a quick summary of the budget.

### **Legislation of interest to IFT**

The legislature approved over 400 bills this session that will be transmitted to the Governor's desk in the coming weeks. The Governor can take three different actions: sign the bill, veto the bill in its entirety, or issue an amendatory veto (suggesting the removal of part of the bill). Several significant measures are still awaiting action by the legislature. Here are several measures in both categories of which you should be aware.

#### **IFT Priorities passed to the Governor**

##### ***Making student growth permissive in teacher evaluation***

SB 28 (Lightford/Faver Dias) is an IFT initiative that makes student growth a permissive rather than a mandatory factor in rating teacher performance, provided there is agreement through the local Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) joint committee.

##### ***Adding transparency to state assessment decision-making***

HB 2574 (Scherer/Guzman), another IFT initiative, will require ISBE to post on its website information about assessment contracts, costs, and timelines and mandate ISBE to work with stakeholders when making assessment decisions. This bill was facilitated by ISBE.

##### ***Examining Librarians and Libraries in Higher Education***

SJR 13 (Halpin/Chung) – an IFT/UPI initiative. The resolution creates the University Library and Professional Librarian Access and Transparency Task Force to examine the current State of libraries and professional librarianship on Illinois public university campuses and present a recommendation to the General Assembly to ensure that public academic libraries and the educational services provided by professional librarian faculty remain viable and healthy benefits to Illinois students.

#### **Priorities that require further action**

##### **Pensions**

The IFT and We Are One (WAO) have been engaged with legislative leaders, Governor JB Pritzker, and rank-and-file lawmakers for more than a year, aggressively lobbying for Tier 2 changes this session. The coalition negotiated SB 1937 in response to concerns from the Governor's office and legislative leaders. Union members across this State also made their voices heard, sending over 100,000 emails, making tens of thousands of phone calls, submitting thousands of witness slips, and engaging in countless conversations with legislators in support of our proposals. Despite all those actions, we weren't granted a committee hearing. WAO will be back next session, doubling down on our efforts to fix the unfair Tier 2 pension benefit. This fight is far from over.

### **Federal Mediation Conciliation Service**

With Trump gutting the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), Illinois labor stakeholders worked with the Governor's office to create its own mediation program. The agreed-upon language was scheduled to be included in a legislative measure during the final days of session, but it was ultimately never added. This issue is on our radar. Any additional action that needs to be taken will be in future legislative sessions.

### **Adequate and Equitable Public University Funding**

Over the last several years, Illinois lawmakers have been working on a plan to boost and more equitably fund higher education (SB 13). The plan outlines the amount of investment each public university requires to support its unique student populations. Yet, despite years of work and hearings on the issue, the plan has not received a vote in either the House or the Senate. The IFT will continue to stay engaged and work towards its passage in future legislative sessions.

### **Transparency for IFT/IDOT Mechanics**

HB 3005 (Evans/Peters), an IFT initiative, would require the Illinois Department of Transportation to set a goal of filling 85% of mechanic positions and file a yearly report with the General Assembly. This bill did pass the House but was stopped in the Senate by the Governor's office. The IFT will continue to push for its passage during the veto session and into the next legislative session if necessary.

### **Notice to remedy clarifications**

HB 2970 (Moeller/Villanueva) aims to clarify existing language in the statute around "notice to remedy" to ensure that teachers receive appropriate due process and fair treatment in disciplinary cases. Currently, these notices can be issued without just cause, cannot be challenged, and remain on a teacher's record indefinitely, hindering professional growth. This measure proposes a more reasonable framework that includes the right to challenge a notice based on a just cause standard, limits the duration and scope of its application, and reaffirms that it applies only to remediable - not criminal - conduct. This legislation aims to protect teachers' rights while maintaining accountability and student safety. The House approved this bill, but the Senate did not act on it.

### **Cell phones policies in schools legislation**

SB 2427 (Castro/Mussman) requires that, before the 2026-2027 school year, each school board must adopt and implement a wireless communication device policy that prohibits students from using wireless communication devices during instructional time, with exceptions, and includes guidance for the secure and accessible storage of wireless devices during instructional time. This was a main priority for the Governor this session and passed through the Senate easily. The measure got hung up in the House and ultimately didn't pass this session. It's expected that the issue will be revisited during the veto session.

### **Tracked legislation that passed both chambers**

### Limits on K-2 suspensions

HB 3772 (W. Davis/Lightford) will impose limits on suspensions for early childhood programs that receive state funding. Only a school district superintendent or equivalent may suspend a preschool student for three or more days. Suspensions cannot last longer than the time needed to create and implement a behavior intervention or safety plan. Students in kindergarten through grade 2 cannot be expelled unless required by law.

### Educator short-term licensure

SB 1584 (Feigenholtz/Faver Dias) will require ISBE to allow an individual who has received a short-term approval license under the Illinois Administrative Code to extend the validity of the short-term approval license beyond the expiration date if the individual has taken leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.

### Prohibition against Higher Education policy on unpaid student teaching

HB 3528 (Crawford/A. Johnson) prohibits Illinois colleges and universities from requiring or maintaining a policy that requires unpaid student teaching for preservice teachers.

### Literacy plan alignment

HB 1368 (Faver Dias/Lightford) requires approved professional development providers to ensure that professional development activities related to literacy instruction are aligned to evidence-based strategies as defined in the comprehensive literacy plan for the State developed by the State Board of Education (rather than aligned with the comprehensive literacy plan for the State developed by the State Board of Education).

### Artificial Intelligence in Community College Instruction

HB 1859 (Rashid/Porfirio) mandates that individual faculty members must teach courses at community colleges. Additionally, it prohibits AI as the sole source of instruction for students. Faculty members are free to utilize AI to enhance their course instruction.

### Statewide guidance on Artificial Intelligence for K-12

SB 1920 (Turner/Faver Dias) requires the ISBE to develop statewide guidelines for school districts and educators on the use of artificial intelligence in elementary and secondary education. The legislation also adds to the recommendation that an age-appropriate unit on Internet safety instruction should include recognizing and reporting online harassment and cyberbullying by including a unit that covers the creation and distribution of false representations of individuals generated by artificial intelligence. This includes, but is not limited to, sexually explicit images and videos.

### K-3 dyslexia screening

SB 1672 (Belt/Mussman) will require each school district serving students in grades K-3 to report to ISBE the literacy screeners being used, the skills they assess, and the frequency of administration. The bill requires ISBE to report the information collected from districts to the General Assembly by January 1, 2027.

### Third-party contract in emergencies only

SB 1799 (Villivalam/Olickal) updates Illinois statutes to still allow for third-party contracting in school districts for non-instructional services (such as custodial, cafeteria, and transportation services) but only in emergencies. It now requires agreement from the impacted bargaining unit to enter into a third-party contract more than once per school year. The bill defines emergencies as "a sudden, unforeseen event threatening the safety or health of students and staff that necessitates immediate action."

### Free-Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) access

HB 2337 (Faver Dias/Koehler) addresses special education settlements. Concerning impartial due process hearings, the measure provides that no mediation, resolution, or settlement agreement can require parents, students (18 or older), or their representatives to waive their right to a free and appropriate public education or the right to file claims about its non-implementation. Any such agreements that include these waivers are unenforceable in administrative proceedings or in state or federal courts.

### Special education co-op withdrawal process

HB 2390 (Katz Muhl/Fine) establishes a more structured process for how districts can enter, modify, or withdraw from a special education cooperative. Examples of provisions include an 18-month notice and a public hearing before withdrawal, as well as a comprehensive transition plan outlining how a district will continue special education services if it leaves a cooperative.

### Prohibit Denial Free Education

HB 3247 (Jimenez/Villa) ensures that every child has equal access to a free public education, regardless of their immigration status. The bill emphasizes the need for schools to create safe environments free from intimidation related to immigration enforcement by requiring schools to develop procedures for ICE and other law enforcement actions on school campuses and facilities.

### Special education caseload study

SJR 2 (Cappel/Faver Dias) directs the Professional Review Panel and ISBE to provide a formal report that investigates the feasibility of implementing maximum caseloads for special education teachers and to perform financial modeling to understand the cost implications. The report would be due by December 31, 2026.

### Mandate reduction council

SB 1740 (Edly-Allen/Mussman) establishes the Mandate Reduction Council, which will review school code mandates and make recommendations to the General Assembly on those that can be reduced, streamlined, modernized, or repealed. It does so by creating a council, comprised of twenty members: eight legislators and 12 others from statewide education groups. Teachers' unions are represented on the council.

### Western Illinois University endowment loan

SB 1310 (Halpin/G. Johnson) empowers the Western Illinois University (WIU) Board of Trustees to borrow money from the WIU Foundation or any financial institution for lawful purposes. The borrowed amount must be repaid within five years and cannot exceed \$2M at any time.

#### Mental health on campus

HB 3385 (N. Hernandez/Villa) instructs the Board of Trustees for Illinois public colleges and universities to create a panel with at least two administrators, two faculty members, and one mental health professional. Each public college or university must have at least three on-site licensed counselors or social workers.

#### Dual Credit changes

HB 2967 (Costa Howard/Castro) updates the Dual Credit Quality Act to add additional oversight, protect academic standards, and clarify the roles of school districts and community colleges in delivering dual credit. The bill requires school districts to first negotiate with their local community college before entering into agreements with other institutions. It keeps high standards for instructors and credentialing to maintain rigor.

#### Educator licensure revocation disclosure

SB 1329 (Murphy/Stuart) allows the State Superintendent of Education or their designee to notify a license holder's current or most recent employer if the license holder is being investigated for alleged acts of misconduct that pose a threat to the safety of students.

#### Ban on municipal ticketing in schools

SB 1519 (Villa/Ford) prohibits students from receiving a ticket for a municipal ordinance violation on school grounds during school as a disciplinary consequence. It requires public reporting of law enforcement referrals and requires schools that use School Resource Officers (SROs) to create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with local law enforcement agencies.

#### Nursing mothers in the workplace

SB 212 (Fine/Stuart) provides that an employer must provide 30 minutes of paid break time (rather than reasonable break time) to an employee who needs to express breast milk for her nursing infant child.

#### Affirming equal employment

HR 161 (E. Hernandez) - Affirms the steadfast commitment to equal employment opportunity and economic equity for women and all Illinoisans.