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## Law will make school mergers easier

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SPRINGFIELD -- School district mergers may become easier under a new law signed by Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Monday.

The law allows schools that want to consolidate to do so while protecting the rights of those that don't.

"It will give local school districts much greater flexibility to consolidate, and voters, who know their schools best, will have much greater control over how their school districts are run," said Blagojevich in a prepared statement.

Illinois has 875 school districts; 200 contain only one school. The state estimates 700 of the districts contain five or fewer schools.

"It removes barriers that for decades have been impediments to districts looking at reorganization," said state Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville, a school superintendent and a sponsor of the legislation.

State law requires voter approval for consolidation.

Under the old law, potential consolidations involving three or more districts could be scuttled if one district's voters opposed the move.

Under the reforms, the districts that approved the consolidation would be able to go forward with it, while the other could continue operating as a single unit. The lone district also will have five years to change its mind and join the merger.

The lawmaker said more still needs to be done to promote reorganization such as making it easier for consolidating districts to get money to build new schools.

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