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School Transportation Cuts Could Have Far-Reaching Consequences

SPRINGFIELD – Slashing state funding for public school transportation in half could have dire unintended consequences for students, parents and taxpayers according to the head of the statewide organization that represents school superintendents throughout the state.

“Things sometimes look great on paper, but these proposed cuts would reach into the classroom and potentially even have safety implications for children,” said Brent Clark, executive director of the Illinois Association of School Administrators. “Providing transportation for students is mandated by the state, so districts would have to shift local resources from the classroom and other places to fulfill that mandate.”

Schools are required to provide transportation for students living beyond a mile-and-a-half from their school or students who must cross hazardous routes to get to school. The governor’s proposed budget for FY12 calls for a 49.6 percent cut to the amount requested by the Illinois State Board of Education for public school and vocational school transportation.

“In talking to superintendents from across the state, the potential consequences include reduction in classroom staff, hardships for parents and creating more dangerous situations for students,” said Clark, noting that elimination of some bus routes is one of the cost-cutting strategies many districts would have to implement in order to fulfill the state transportation mandate.

Consequences of reducing the number of bus routes could include:

- Round-trip rides of up to three hours in some rural areas;
- Safety hazards associated with more traffic congestion as more parents would end up driving their children to school;
- Hardships for families whose schedules do not allow for them to drive their children to

school even if they deem the bus rides to be too long or conditions on the buses to be unsafe;

- Reduction or elimination of transportation for educational field trips and/or extracurricular activities; and

- Elimination of summer school because transportation to summer school is not reimbursable by the state and those local funds would have to be used to help fill the huge budget hole for regular school transportation.

“Considering how much families depend on public school transportation for their children, these cuts are not reasonable,” Clark said. “Factor in the increases and volatility of fuel prices, and school districts will only have two choices: either raise local taxes if they are not already taxing at their limit, or implement cuts that would negatively affect education in the classroom and could even place children in danger getting to and from school.”

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