



Bethalto Community Unit School District #8

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April 5, 2017

Dear Bethalto School District Families:

You may see some information in the local print and television media regarding a lawsuit that the Bethalto School District, along with other school districts, recently filed against the State of Illinois, Governor Bruce Rauner, and the Illinois State Board of Education. This letter is to provide you with some information regarding the lawsuit.

At the February 28th Board of Education meeting, the Bethalto School Board unanimously approved a resolution to file suit against the State of Illinois for failing to adequately fund State-issued mandates regarding the Illinois Learning Standards. The Bethalto School District is one of seventeen school districts across Illinois, with more expected to join in the coming weeks, demanding that the State of Illinois meet its constitutional duties to:

- 1) Ensure all children in Illinois receive a "high quality" education and;
- 2) Fund school districts adequately and equitably so each and every school can offer all students the "high quality" education they deserve.

In 2010, Illinois adopted the New Illinois Learning Standards, which spelled out exactly what students should learn and be able to do at each grade level. Meanwhile, since 2009, school districts across Illinois have been forced to navigate hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to our operating revenues. As a district, we have taken many steps to be as efficient as possible despite State cuts to our revenue, while spending funds on implementing State-mandated learning standards. The standards themselves provide us with a beneficial roadmap for learning. But districts like ours across the State have spent millions of dollars aligning to the new standards through curriculum and technology updates without any additional funding to support the transition required by the State. In other words, we have had to use already reduced funding to cover the costs of implementing these new mandated standards.

Initially, the State adopted new English Language Arts and Math standards and we have been working towards aligning ourselves to them as a district. In subsequent years, the State has adopted Science standards and most recently adopted new Social Studies standards. The State just continues to increase standards through unfunded mandates without additional revenue to support their implementation. We are surviving in times of unprecedented accountability by the State, while experiencing unprecedented cuts to our revenue from the State.

At our March 27th, Board of Education meeting, the Board approved a 2.2 million dollar deficit reduction plan, cutting over 2.2 million dollars from next year's budget, simply to balance the books. This was not a decision that our Board or I took lightly.

Over the past 6-8 years, the Bethalto School District, has lost over 5.6 million dollars due to the proration of General State Aid and the proration of transportation reimbursement from the State. This

year alone, the State has yet to make 1.7 million dollars of categorical payments to support special education services, transportation, and early childhood education. This includes \$0.00 to support our special education students and \$0.00 to help transport our students to and from school. This is the information we continue to share with you in our parent messages. Leaders in Springfield have proudly announced education funding has reached record-high levels this year, that is simply misleading.

School districts in Illinois have endured funding shortages and proration the last 6-8 years, costing districts throughout Illinois billions of dollars. Furthermore, the State dollars that are flowing are being emptied into a school funding system that ranks as one of the least equitable in the nation. We see remarkable disparities in funding levels between the wealthiest districts and the least affluent districts. This is not just happening in Chicago, southern Illinois is suffering too. On average, Illinois school districts with the greatest number of low-income students receive 20% less funding than students from wealthier districts.

A bi-partisan commission in Springfield declared that the current funding system is broken, however our Governor and legislative leaders have been unwilling to compromise in the best interest of our students. We welcome setting high standards, holding our students accountable to high expectations, and operating our districts as efficiently as possible. However, even with the highest and most rigorous standards in the history of our State, they alone will have little impact if we do not have the resources required to help students meet those standards. The State must provide adequate and equitable funding based on each district's unique needs.

Districts face instability year in and year out because of revenue cuts, inequitable funding, and unfunded mandates. The current practice must change; our students are the ones who suffer. School districts across Illinois would not take on the arduous task of bringing this lawsuit forward unless we believed that we have unquestionably reached a breaking point. Enough is enough and we must draw the line. Our children, our teachers, and our communities deserve better. Until the State enacts an education funding system that adequately and equitably funds every school district in Illinois, we are unwilling to maintain a status quo that puts the future of our students at risk.

We appreciate your continued support of the Bethalto School District and we are committed to continuing the fight to ensure that our district, schools, and students receive the adequate and equitable funding that they rightfully deserve and are Constitutionally guaranteed.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Griffin", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bill R. Griffin, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools