



## Bottom line on schools

### Armed with the data, taxpayers can help shape debate

By Emily Krone | Daily Herald Staff

Published: 11/25/2007 12:14 AM

In Chapter 1 of School Finance 101, we said we would provide readers with the ammunition and information necessary to help shape the debate over school finance in Illinois.

Here's a recap of some key findings:

- Statewide, school districts collected \$171 billion from 1996-97 through 2005-06.
- During that decade, average per-pupil revenue to Illinois school districts increased by more than twice the rate of inflation.
- During the decade, the state supplied just 29 percent of the money collected by all Illinois public schools.
- During the decade, suburban schools typically collected 84 percent of their revenue from local sources.
- During the decade, suburban districts, which generally have the highest cost of living in the state, received half as much state aid as districts in other parts of the state with similar property wealth.
- Two-thirds of the typical suburban tax bill goes to schools. All other local services split the remainder.
- Over the past decade, suburban districts spent an average of 48 percent of their revenue on instruction and teacher-pupil activities.
- During the decade 20 suburban districts spent more than two-thirds of their total revenues outside the class.
- Between 1998 and 2006, the average teacher pay in 94 suburban school districts grew from \$46,883 to \$59,986, an increase of 28 percent.
- In 2006, the average administrator in the 94 districts covered by the Daily Herald made \$110,747, compared with \$81,023 in 1998, a 37 percent bump.
- Compensation for suburban school chiefs in the 2005-06 school year ranged from \$121,565 to \$394,995.
- Illinois schools owed a total of \$16 billion in bond loans at the end of 2005-06. The debt rose 144 percent in just seven years.
- Just one of five seniors leaves the billion-dollar Illinois public school system ready for college -- or the workplace -- according to ACT test scores.

The Illinois Education Association has called for a constitutional amendment to increase the state contribution to public schools.

The Illinois Federation of Teachers has called for "comprehensive changes in the state's fiscal system."

The Illinois Association of School Administrators wants to increase state funding and amend or repeal laws that limit the amount schools can collect from taxpayers.

This year, lawmakers battled over but did not pass two school funding reform bills.

The plan supported by Gov. Rod Blagojevich would have imposed a new tax on business and generated an estimated \$7.7 billion extra for health care and schools.

The plans all draw on a basic premise: The main problem with the public school system is a lack of money.

School Finance 101 was designed to add depth to a debate that too often centers only on whether schools have too much or too little.

As we noted in Chapter 1, a position paper by the Illinois Education Association says the way money is raised by, allocated to and distributed in public schools is fundamentally flawed.

You decide.