

# Forum addresses school funding

by Sarah Masanek

Focus Editor

In recent years, school funding has become an important issue in the Illinois state legislature. Many schools have struggled with inadequate state funding, low tax bases and failed referenda, all of which could create a major deficiency in funds and might eliminate many school programs, mainly those that are extracurricular.

To help remedy this situation, on May 6, a forum was held at the Oakton Community Center to discuss the ongoing issue that is public school funding. The purpose of the meeting, according to Village of Skokie Trustee Randall Roberts, was to “learn and share ideas on what’s going on in Springfield with school funding.”

Roberts said that we “cannot continue down this road” in regards to the current amount of school funding that is taken from income and property taxes.

Speakers at the meeting included several state legislators, and organizations such as A+ Illinois and Neighbors for Strong Schools (NSS) were present, which both support of funding and tax reform.

According to the NSS, Illinois ranks 48th out of the 50 states as to the amount of funding provided to public school districts from the state. In addition to that statistic, board president of School District 73.5 James McGowan reported that the state has not met the 51% standard that is supposed to be paid for school funding. Rather, schools have received about 34%.

Since Illinois mandates that certain programs appear in schools, such as Special Education and English as a Second Language (ESL), schools are forced to provide them, even when the state does not issue enough funding.

Gowan said that “there is no better way to spend the state’s precious resources than on education funding.”

While Gowan, also a member of the Niles Township Federation of Teachers (NTFT), clearly supports the movement towards an increase in state funding, state legislators such as senators Ira Silverstein and Jeff Shoenberg and Representative Lou Lang remain apprehensive about reforms.

One measure currently under review by the state legislature is the Education and Fiscal Responsibility Act, House Bill/Senate Bill (HB/SB) 750, which proposes a solution to the funding problem. If passed, it would lower property taxes by 25% and increase state income tax from 3% to 5%. Furthermore, it would add consumer services to the state sales tax, which would reportedly generate \$2.2 billion for education. The Center for Tax and Budget Accountability calls the bill “a comprehensive package of fiscal solutions” which would generate \$9.05 billion from both individual and corporate income tax increases.

However, Lang stated that he does not believe HB/SB 750 is going to pass, which he finds unfortunate.

“We may never have a better plan,” he said.

Silverstein is equally pessimistic. “I don’t know how we are going to solve education funding,” Silverstein said. He reported that there have been no “meaningful conversations” on education in Springfield.

Lang concurs. “I’m not convinced we’re going to do anything,” he said. “Springfield is a mess on education funding.”

Nevertheless, Shoenberg is “cautiously optimistic.” However, he said that property tax relief is necessary.

“I know we’re going to succeed because we cannot afford not to [do so],” he said.

Despite these Illinois politicians’ reservations, Skokie Mayor George Van Dusen believes there is definitely a need for education reform. “This state can and must address the situation in a bipartisan and not political stance,” he said.

