

# On third try, Illinois House approves education funding bill

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SPRINGFIELD — Following some twists and turns, the [Illinois House](#) on Monday narrowly approved an education funding measure, taking a major step toward authorizing state aid for school districts and setting the stage for a bigger [Chicago Public Schools](#) property tax increase.

The 73-34 vote --- two more than needed for approval --- sends the bill to the Senate, where a favorable vote is expected as soon as Tuesday. After the House vote, Republican Gov. [Bruce Rauner](#) walked the House floor and thanked lawmakers. In recent days, the governor has both indicated he's eager for the bill to reach his desk and heavily criticized it as being too generous to Chicago Public Schools.

The House approved the compromise version after first rejecting it earlier Monday. Then the House held a separate vote to override Rauner's veto of the education funding bill that lawmakers approved last month. That, too, failed.

Many [Democrats](#) had voted against the bill on the first try, but after they saw an override of Rauner wasn't going to pass, they switched on the second try.

House Republican Leader [Jim Durkin](#) said the bill was "absolutely not" perfect, but urged lawmakers to vote for it anyway.

"I have been around here long enough to know that legislative perfection especially on an issue of this magnitude is nearly impossible. Take our nearly. It is impossible to find," said Durkin, of Western Springs.

"My hope is that moving forward this will serve as an example of what can happen when we put partisan bickering and fighting aside and negotiate in good faith to get things done for the families of Illinois."

Absent a school funding bill, districts already have missed a pair of state aid checks, though students have returned to class in many communities.

The flurry of activity comes as lawmakers returned to the Capitol to consider the product of bipartisan school funding negotiations among the four Democrat and Republican legislative leaders. Those talks were held after Rauner used his amendatory veto powers to rewrite the education bill lawmakers approved last month, saying it set aside too much money for CPS. Without a new funding formula in place, the state has been unable to send checks to school districts.

While Rauner and leading [Republicans](#) have come out in support of the proposal, it reflects few of the changes the governor was pushing. Indeed, CPS officials said the district could get as much as \$450 million from the proposal

--- about \$150 million more than officials had anticipated.



Republicans pointed to a victory, a new \$75 million program that would provide tax credits to those who donate money to create scholarships for low-income students to attend private schools. If that provision attracted some GOP votes to the bill, it pulled off votes from some Democratic lawmakers who argued the plan would take away money from public schools.

"We've eroded the funding for public education once again," said Rep. [Mary Flowers](#), D-Chicago.

Teachers unions have made in a push the last several days to try to derail the compromise measure.

Several Democrats called on their colleagues to reject the deal struck by legislative leaders, saying lawmakers should instead vote to override Rauner's veto. The deadline for that to take place is Tuesday, and it's unlikely that effort would be successful because it would require Republicans to buck Rauner, something few have been willing to do on the education issue so far.

Supporters of the compromise version called for cooler heads, saying each side had to give in order to reach a deal.

"Our primary objective here is to make sure we do something different here in Illinois," said sponsoring Rep. Will Davis, D-Homewood.

"By definition, a compromise includes things you like and things you don't like," said Rep. [Robert Pritchard](#), R-Hinckley.

Under the legislation, the Chicago Board of Education would be allowed to raise property taxes by an additional \$120 million, Democratic legislators said. Cook County Clerk [David Orr](#)'s office, however, put that figure at closer to \$163 million. The new money would go into the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund.

The state also would spend much more on Chicago teachers' pensions: \$221 million, compared to about \$12.2 million last year. That change will not be written into the school funding bill but instead inserted into laws governing the state's retirement systems — reflecting a change Rauner wanted.

That led Rep. Jeanne Ives, R-Wheaton, to charge that the bill was "one, huge, massive and sustaining bailout of the Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund."

Other changes in the bill will allow voters in school districts with a surplus of education money to determine via a referendum if they want to cut property taxes. This would apply predominantly in suburban districts, with a decrease likely limited to no more than 10 percent.

In addition, the state would roll back various requirements that it doesn't help districts pay for, including daily physical education classes and driver's education courses. The bill would allow schools to cut P.E. to three times a week, and hire outside companies to run driver's ed.

On the first try, the compromise bill failed in large part due to a lack of Democratic support. Of the 61 votes against, 42 were Democratic lawmakers. Only 18 Democrats voted for the bill, with 28 Republicans voting in favor.

On the override, supporters needed 71 votes to overturn the governor, but got

63. Those were all Democratic votes, as no Republicans voted to override their governor.

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