

Inequity rampant in Illinois public schools

New Trier stands as an outlier as other schools struggle to find minimal funding

by Georgia Caras

Although rarely discussed in New Trier’s hallways, the way schools are funded in Illinois dramatically affects the lives of every public school student in the state, regardless of the township they live in.

Under the current system, schools across Illinois are given roughly the same amount of money from the state, while the rest of school funding comes from local property taxes.

This property tax is a regressive flat tax, meaning that there is a uniform tax for everyone, regardless of financial situation.

To put the proportion of funding into perspective, according to Christopher Johnson, New Trier’s Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations, “New Trier receives approximately 95 percent from local sources (property taxes, fees, other local revenue), 3 percent from the state, and 2 percent from the federal government.”

With the amount of school funding generated locally, along with the remarkable financial situation of many families in this township, it becomes evident why many public high schools are not as fortunate.

Spiro Bolos, a Social Studies

teacher and Social Service board sponsor, volunteers with the Metropolitan Community project, a project comprised of both students and faculty at New Trier that partner with CPS schools to advocate for fair funding of schools in Illinois.

He explained that with a lack of funding, “Schools lack a lot of support services, like having an adviser or a nurse. If they can’t go to the nurse, some kids go home, or don’t come to school at all.”

In addition to its direct impact, stark correlations can be found between school funding and student opportunity.

According to the Illinois Report Card, New Trier prepares 92 percent of its students for college, and has a low-income student population of 4 percent.

Conversely, Fenger High School – a CPS school just 30 minutes south of New Trier – prepares only 4 percent of its students for college and has a low income population of 97 percent.

With lower-valued properties in the Fenger district, property tax revenue cannot adequately fund the schools, and thus resources are heavily impacted.

Given such statistics, many may have the initial reaction to give a portion of New Trier’s funding to schools in need. Bolos explained such a model, where, “In some other states, they collect all of the tax revenue and distribute it according to need instead of zip code.”

However, this may not be the most mutually beneficial solution to



As other schools struggle with finding funding, New Trier spent roughly \$100 million on a new addition | Zervas

such a complex issue.

Johnson explained that “If property tax money was re-distributed, it would reduce the funding available to us, unless there was another source for us to raise additional revenue. If no additional revenue was raised, this would likely lead to a dramatic change to the educational programming we are able to offer our students.”

In terms of other types of funding systems that can be adopted, Johnson said, “I believe a plan that raises revenue for districts that are the most in need, combined with a change in the state funding available to other districts, would be an effective plan to quickly provide

funds to districts that need more fiscal support. This type of plan also would allow districts like ours to continue to offer a high quality program for our students.”

Although there is a discussion behind various methods, many students, especially in the school districts negatively impacted by the current system, believe that this is an issue in definite need of reform.

Max Garland, a junior at Taft High School in Chicago, said, “We have no money. We are losing teachers. Nothing gets fixed. Once the lights in our gym were broken and they weren’t fixed for three months. We couldn’t use the gym at all.”

Although school funding

reformation is a complex issue, Bolos said students can play a vital role in the initial steps, by “going down to Springfield and requesting an audience with a legislator. Those are the only people that can do anything. Springfield is the only place that can change things.”

Bolos said that his club has written letters, which has given them an audience with legislators in the past. According to State Senator Daniel Biss, the most powerful thing a person can do to raise awareness in the general assembly is to hand-write a letter and talk about experiences with the issue. Those types of letters get more attention than an email, or even a march.

New state requirement brings mandatory fitness testing

Students, including varsity athletes, will be required to take fitness test

by Maya Kowitz

A new state requirement implemented this fall, requires all students participating in physical education in the state of Illinois to do fitness testing.

The new law was created to monitor the fitness levels of Illinois youth over time, by having them perform various fitness tests and then recording their results to assess how physically fit individual students are.

The fitness test consists of push-ups, sit-ups, sit and reach, and the pacer.

Many students may recall some of these tests from their experience with fitness testing back in middle school.

Junior Alli Schwartz recalls when they had to do similar tests, and then recorded their scores every fall and spring.

“Those who performed very well on their test would receive a shirt for achieving the ‘Presidential Fitness Award’ and those who met the national requirement would receive a certificate. This motivated people to try hard for fitness testing and take it seriously,” Schwartz said.

Kinetic Wellness teacher, Michael Napoleon, is one of the teachers at New Trier that now has to enforce these new physical education requirements, and ensure that his students are putting up results that

accurately determine their fitness.

“From what I’ve heard students aren’t putting forth a ton of effort into these tests, but I am going to make sure that all of my students try their best to apply themselves to these tests,” Napoleon said.

Schwartz believes this lack of motivation comes from the frustration that students have with this new state requirement, since most have not had to perform a fitness test since middle school.

Varsity athletes and who are exempt from KW are expected to come back and take a fitness test during their free or KW period, along with KW leaders who must perform the tests alongside their kinetic wellness class.

Napoleon noted that since this is a state requirement, teachers will have makeup dates to ensure everyone participates in the fitness testing.

Childhood obesity in the United States has more than doubled in children in the past 30 years

Sophomore Jenna Katlin also has to do fitness testing, even though she takes dance to fill her KW requirement.

Though Katlin stated she is not fond of the new state law, she says that she is glad that the fitness tests don’t include the mile run.

“We had to run the mile in middle school and I always hated it. I just don’t think a number or score should determine whether you’re healthy or not,” Katlin said.

Napoleon acknowledged the reason why the state has created this new law is to get data on where the students are as far as fitness goes.

“I just wonder how these results are going to be used. Is it going to say ‘we have some out of shape students so we have to do this’. Or are they going to put new things into our curriculum to push students to be more fit. I’m curious as to how the state is going to use these results.”

Elissa Bassler, executive director of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity and CEO of the Illinois Public Health Institute, said this new legislation is a way to address the obesity epidemic in children.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, childhood obesity in the United States has more than doubled in children and tripled in adolescents in the past 30 years.

The startling statistic is why the state now requires fitness testing. Despite these facts students still don’t see the necessity of the testing.

“No one tries in KW. No one wants to sweat,” said senior Isabelle Sennet

Junior Lawrence Webb feels that students aren’t going to try in the fitness tests because they believes that what they do in kinetic wellness is sufficient enough.

Though students like senior Ryan McGuinness question, “Why does the state need to know how many push-ups I can do?” Napoleon stands by his opinion that this health-related physical fitness assessment is important in determining Illinois youth’s healthy fitness zone.

A teenager is 65% more likely to get in a car crash when driving under the influence of marijuana because it impairs perception and coordination.*

OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR

77% of NTHS students have not used weed in the past 30 days.**

*U.S. Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Traffic Safety Facts: Drug Involvement of Fatally Injured Drivers, Washington, DC, November 2010.
**Data from the KW survey, N=3,001.
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