

2/24/15

The Governor's Playbook for Compassion

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When Gov. Bruce Rauner unveiled his plan to fix Illinois, he pledged to advance the values of competition and compassion. One key constituent group in critical need of compassion is the growing number of students living in poverty. For example, in Glenbard District 87, 32% of our students come from low-income families. Students from low-income families often have weak literacy and math skills, may be from homes that have little stability and have parents who lack the typical privileged middle class skills of arranging resources and opportunities for their children. The following are compassionate-centered actions the governor could take that would bring about positive, measurable change for these students:

Restructure an Outdated School Funding Model

While Illinois property taxes are high in comparison to other states, there are potential opportunities for new revenue in income and services taxes. Rather than relying on the advice of politicians and special interest groups, the governor should invite a team of economists and experienced public school funding experts to study our system and recommend a funding model that is equitable and adequate for every student.

Allow a “No Stakes” Implementation Year for the PARCC Assessments

This inaugural implementation year of the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) exams is forecasted to be plagued with logistical, technical and curricular alignment problems. This likely will result in schools with higher numbers of low-income students again being targeted as failing schools. What’s needed is time, resources and support as teachers who are already working with underperforming students make the shift to these more rigorous exams.

Value and Celebrate our Amazing Public School Teachers

The governor needs to take time and effort to become acquainted with the hard working teachers who serve students and families struggling in poverty. Instead of highlighting tenure, merit pay and performance reviews, he should learn about the best research-based instructional practices teachers are employing. Discover the importance that key resources play in providing an optimal learning environment. Empathize with the myriad of challenges teachers face as they maintain high standards for all students, while addressing students’ social emotional issues, stress, hunger, neglect, abuse, homelessness and dysfunctional home lives.

Be Wary of Charter Schools

The governor should be cautious when considering funneling community tax dollars to alternative schools run by for profit management companies. Charter schools often

cherry pick students, divide communities and generally do not outperform the local public schools. Families living in poverty do not need more choice and private market incentives. Real compassion for struggling families means providing encouragement, resources and customized support.

If the governor is serious about prioritizing K-12 public schools in Illinois, he should follow the Vision 20/20 plan. This strategic plan highlights four action areas for strengthening all schools, particularly those with underserved students. These four action areas include:

- Highly effective teachers
- 21st century learning
- Shared accountability
- Equitable and adequate funding

The Vision 20/20 plan should be the “game plan” that Rauner and his team follow as they prioritize the role of public schools and work to keep their commitment of making Illinois both competitive and compassionate.