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Increasing Responsibilities of Public Education

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The inception and establishment of public schools began in the 16th and 17th centuries. Compared with today, the original expectations for America's public schools were simple – teach basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills and cultivate the values of a democratic society (some history and civics implied). The creators of the original public schools assumed that families and churches bore the major responsibility for raising the child.

Beginning in the 19th century, society began to assign additional responsibilities to schools. Politicians and business leaders viewed public schools as the logical place to assimilate newly arrived immigrants and help with the social engineering of the first generation of the Industrial Age.

This trend of increasing public schools' responsibilities began then and has accelerated ever since. Just look at what we have added through the decades:

From 1900 to 1940, we added:

Nutrition	Speech and drama
Immunization	Half-day kindergarten
Vocational education	School lunch programs
The practical arts	Business education
Physical education and organized sports	

In the 1950s and 1960s, we added:

Driver's education	Consumer education
Foreign language requirements	Career education
Sex education	Peace education
Advanced Placement programs	Leisure/recreation

In the 1970s and 1980s, we added:

Special education	Bilingual education
Drug and alcohol abuse education	Keyboarding and computer education
Parent education	Jump Start, Head Start, Even Start
Character education	Full day kindergarten
Early childhood education	Anti-smoking education
Environmental education	Sexual abuse prevention education
School breakfast programs	Multi-cultural education
Child abuse monitoring	Health and psychological services
Title IX (expanded sports for girls)	Stranger/danger education

And finally, in the 1990s and 2000s, we added:

HIV/AIDS education	Anti-bullying education
Expanded computer/Internet education	Internet safety education
Integrated special education classes	Intruder alert training
Tech prep and school to work programs	Steroid abuse education
Bus safety education	Bike safety

Despite not adding any minutes to the school day, public schools have heroically responded to this rising flood of expectations over the last few decades. Teachers are instructing more students in more subjects to higher levels in more creative and dynamic ways than ever before. Despite this daunting agenda, our amazing public schools have prepared millions of people from all classes and backgrounds to achieve the American dream. Public education has played a principal role in helping America become the world's pre-eminent democracy and most successful economy.

Gov. Rauner and our legislators need to be reminded that adequate resources are critical to the continued efforts to meet this myriad of educational expectations. Appropriate investment in our local public schools is the best strategy to ensure that all Illinois citizens can thrive and prosper. This investment in public schools is the best turnaround strategy for Illinois.