

# Rauner at Glenbard: Reduce school mandates for gym, driver ed



By: Marie Wilson

Mandates the state places on schools concerning physical education, driver education and noninstructional contracts could be lifted under legislation Gov. Bruce Rauner and state lawmakers proposed Friday in Lombard.

Speaking at Glenbard East High School, Rauner said the proposal to relieve restrictions is the first in an effort to give educational decisions back to local officials.

"This is about more funding and more flexibility," Rauner said. "We've got to get the bureaucracy out of the classroom and let the teachers teach."

Bills introduced in the House and Senate would give schools more ability to decide how to handle physical education and driver ed as well as greater bidding freedom on contracts for those other than teachers.

In each of those areas, Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti said the state has placed so-called unfunded mandates on schools.

"It's when big government tells little government what to do but they don't give you the money in which to effectuate these new rules," said Sanguinetti, who led a state task force that developed 27 potential solutions for government consolidation and unfunded mandates. "This whole task force report has the objective of giving the power back to our teachers, giving the power back to the children and the schools so that you folks can determine what's best for you and your district."

Illinois schools are required to provide physical education every day, and this proposal wouldn't change that, said Darlene Ruscitti, DuPage regional superintendent. But it would give districts more freedom to provide physical education waivers to student-athletes.

Districts can offer waivers now, but only if they go through what Ruscitti called a "bureaucratic" process at the state level. She said this bill would remove that process and place the decision-making power about gym class waivers with school officials.

State Rep. Ron Sandack, a Downers Grove Republican who introduced the House version of the mandate-reducing bill, said the state's regulations on physical education make it counterproductive to the lives of busy students who are trying to take extra classes to prepare for college.

"Our bill simply says that the school board can make a decision to waive PE requirements when a student is an athlete or engages in physical activity and education outside her or his curriculum environment and set a policy so that some flexibility and some control at the local level can occur," Sandack said. "So, too, with drivers ed."

Schools are required to provide benefits equal to those of teachers for driver ed instructors, even if they're privately contracted, Sandack said. This proposal would relieve that requirement, making it easier for schools to hire private contractors to teach students how to drive if they choose.

Schools outside the city of Chicago are at a disadvantage when it comes to bidding noninstructional contracts, Rauner said. A state mandate places restrictions on pay and benefits for outside employees contracted to provide services such as maintenance, cleaning and transportation.

"It restricts what companies can bid to provide the services and it makes the cost much, much higher than if it was just open, flexible bidding," Rauner said. "Chicago was exempted from this rule as a special deal for the city of Chicago, but why does CPS get a special deal when every other school district in the state is treated differently and is forced to spend more money that could go in the classroom? That's not fair. That's what we're going to change."

With a bit more freedom, Rauner said schools will find their own solutions.

"What we'll find," Rauner said, "is each school finds creative ways to save money."