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Hare works on education

Bill would expand use of PBIS program

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Daily Review Atlas

Posted Mar 08, 2010 @ 07:14 PM

ROSEVILLE — U.S. Rep Phil Hare, D-Rock Island, discussed education reform in an intimate setting in the Monmouth-Roseville Junior High School band room with Superintendent Paul Woehlke, Principal Don Farr and PBIS coordinator Rebecca Harris.

The four sat next to one another in folding chairs while Hare discussed his reform ideas. Hare has been working on the Keeping All Students Safe Act, which would expand Positive Behavior Intervention Supports in school, but would also protect students and provide money for teacher mentoring programs.

Hare's bill would expand the use of school-wide PBIS. Hare first learned of the program during a visit to Monmouth-Roseville in February 2007. PBIS aims to create a healthy learning environment through positive reinforcement and consistent expectations rather than punishment. The idea is that children will understand the rules better if they are acknowledged every time they do something correct rather than punished whenever they do wrong.

There is evidence to support PBIS. According to www.pbisillinois.org, the number of students with more than 28 tardies at East Aurora High School dropped from 715 to 50 after one year under PBIS.

The bill also covers a variety of other educational issues.

Hare said 19 states require no parental notification if a child is hurt by a teacher at school. "A Government Accountability Office investigation found widespread use of abusive, and sometimes deadly, disciplinarian tactics in schools," according to a release from Hare's office.

The bill would prohibit school staff from physically restraining students unless such restraint was required to eliminate danger. It would require a certain amount of school personnel to receive crisis intervention and first aid training. Parents would also be notified if physical restraint is imposed on any student.

The bill would also fund grants for teacher mentoring. Under teacher mentoring first-year teachers will apprentice with established teachers. Ordinarily, 30 to 35 percent of teachers quit their first year, but teachers who are mentored drop out at a rate of about 5 percent, Hare said.

"We can't afford to lose 30 to 35 percent of teachers the first year," he said.

Hare is concerned there aren't enough teachers to educate America's children. He also said he would like to experiment with loan forgiveness in underserved areas. The U.S. government would forgive student loans if a teacher spent a certain amount of time in an underserved area.

Hare's bill also changes the way students are evaluated. Under No Child Left Behind students are evaluated based on national tests. Hare's bill would evaluate students based on growth models.

Children would be competing with themselves to get better rather than other students.

"No Child Left Behind aims to help children who are failing but doesn't help the good kids," Woehlke said.

Growth models would challenge children to continually progress rather than ranking them on national test scores.

Hare also questioned Illinois' education funding system. He said it's a bad idea to fund education primarily on property values.

"When real estate values drop the schools lose money," he said, "and when people lose their jobs and homes, schools lose their money."

When people don't have good education than they can't make money.

However, Hare said there should be more federal money available to help fund education.

"The big winners in the president's budget were veterans' health care and education," he said. Hare told Woehlke he would try to get additional federal funding for the district.

"I am appalled by the cuts in education," Hare said. "Schools are an investment in our future."

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