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Illinois elections take center stage

Focus will be on Obama's home state as gubernatorial races draw attention

No matter who wins today's Democratic and Republican Illinois primaries for senator and governor, the general election contests will be played out on a national stage, for reasons of the calendar as much as the anticipated pitched partisan battles in President Obama's adopted home state.

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State funding delays put Batavia schools in danger

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By **DENISE LINKE** For Sun-Times Media

BATAVIA -- The Batavia School District will be bankrupt in 18 months unless the Illinois Legislature resumes paying state-mandated education grants, according to a presentation to the School Board this week.

"We don't know what the state is going to do, but if they cut all general aid we'll have a \$10.3 million deficit in 2010. It would be only a year and a half before we have a negative fund balance, and we'll be on the financial watch list," said Assistant Superintendent Kris Monn.

Last year the district drew up a \$64 million balanced budget that included about \$7 million in state aid, of which the district has so far received about \$2 million, Monn said. No one knows when -- or if -- the overdue state payments will arrive.

"The state hasn't notified us about any funding cuts. They just stopped sending the payments they're obligated to send us," said board President Ron Link. "We have no idea how much they'll send us in the future, if anything."

About \$3 million of the district's allocated state aid was earmarked for special education, with another \$2.4 million in general aid for all academic programs and \$1.78 million to fund bus transportation for students who live more than 1.25 miles away from school or would have to cross a major road to reach

it. The remainder was meant to fund reading instruction, driver education and other initiatives.

Without the \$5 million the state still owes the district this year, officials will face a \$1.43 million deficit, Monn said. If the district loses all state aid, it will exhaust its reserve funds and face a \$7.3 million deficit in 2012. If that happens, the board will be forced to cut sports teams, arts programs, elective classes and honors classes, Link said.

Parents crowded the board room Tuesday, anxious to avert cuts to school programs.

"Batavians have always stepped up for the town," said resident John Robinson. "We want to continue extracurricular and athletic opportunities for students. Before you make any cuts, come to the community. Local organizations are willing to help."

Link urged parents and other residents to contact their state representatives and demand that school funding be restored.

"Tell them please, they have to help educate these children," Link said. "If enough people put pressure on the legislature, maybe we can get some action by May."