

State Senate is playing politics with city students

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As *Democrat and Chronicle* reporter David Andreatta wrote in a June 9 news story, dueling bills in the state Assembly and Senate are holding up financing for the city schools' \$325 million Facilities and Modernization Program.

At risk are badly needed upgrades at 13 city schools and hundreds of construction jobs associated with the projects.

The issue centers around whether a plan to float

bonds to temporarily fund construction work would require the city to

increase what it pays the school district each year under its state-obligated Maintenance of Effort agreement. The city also wants to avoid incurring expense for the debt payment on those bonds.

The Assembly has introduced a bill that addresses both concerns. But the Senate version adds a wrinkle: Language that would require the city to pay 2 percent of the debt service on the bonds.

The city already pays the schools \$119 million — a majority of what it can levy in taxes — and says it can't afford more. By forcing this increase on the city — which has already made substantial cuts to its own

spending to close a budget gap — the Senate is jeopardizing the entire project.

With the end of the legislative session less than a week away, time is running out.

If the issue isn't settled by then, there will be no funding, the city says, and the whole project will stop.


That means our city students, staff and teachers will be forced to work in aging buildings that need asbestos abatement and repairs to their plumbing.


And there will be no paychecks for hundreds of construction workers expecting to find work on these projects, a big blow to our regional economy.


To the Rochester legislative delegation, we say "Get together and pass the Assembly version of this bill now."


Don't play politics with our school children or our economy.


Sandy Parker is president and CEO of the Rochester Business Alliance.; Ken Warner is executive director of UNICON, a trades organization.


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