

EBF ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR ISBE FY26 BUDGET HEARINGS



October 2024

HELP US ADVOCATE FOR INVESTMENT IN EBF AT THE FY26 ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION BUDGET HEARINGS

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) will be hosting a series of hybrid budget hearings this October. We need the help of advocates to ensure that ISBE prioritizes an investment of at least \$550 million in new funds for the K-12 Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula in its FY26 budget request. Please submit a testimony request today to help ALL Illinois' public school districts reach full funding faster.

The EBF formula was signed into law in 2017 and completely changed the way Illinois funds the K-12 education system. Through EBF, funds are distributed through a research-based estimate of what schools need to fully serve students.

If you would like support through any part of the process, including developing your testimony, please email Maty Ortega Cruz at mortegacruz@advanceillinois.org. If you need help finding your data on your school district (e.g. percentage adequacy), please email Mercedes Wentworth-Nice at mwentworth_nice@advanceillinois.org or visit our Funding Illinois' Future Equity Dashboard here: <https://fundingilfuture.org/equity-dashboard/>.

This mini toolkit includes:

- [About the ISBE Hearings](#)
- [A series of talking points](#)
- [Sample testimony](#)
- [Social media posts](#)

"It is because of EBF, coupled with sound budgeting practices, that our district is back on solid financial footing. Our district has been able to use some EBF dollars as a direct investment in resources for our students. We have hired psychologists, social workers, school counselors, nurses, interventionists, and instructional coaches across our district to ensure we meet the individual needs of the WHOLE child." - Jill Griffin (Bethalto Superintendent)

ABOUT THE ISBE HEARINGS

ISBE will hold **3 Public Hearings** to be conducted in-person and virtually:

- **In-Person: 4-7 p.m. Oct. 8 at 100 North First Street Springfield, IL 62777** – Submit request in writing by **11:59 p.m. Oct. 3**. Speakers who submit online requests after the deadline are not guaranteed a time slot to speak and may be present at the end of the hearing depending on availability of time.
- **Virtual: 4-7 p.m. Oct. 10** – Submit request in writing and [register for the Oct. 10 webinar by 11:59 p.m. Oct. 7](#).
- **Virtual: 1-4 p.m. Oct. 28** – Submit request in writing and [register for the Oct. 28 webinar by: 11:59 p.m. Oct. 23](#).

<https://fundingilfuture.org/>

For information on budget hearings, visit this link: <https://www.isbe.net/budget>

Sign up for written or oral testimony here: <https://www.isbe.net/budgetrequestform>

Click here for a step-by-step overview of the sign-up process. Additional instructions from ISBE can be found at <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/FY26-Budget-Hearing-Instructions.pdf>

There is power in numbers! As you sign up to testify, please know you can submit written testimony or sign up for oral testimony. We hope you consider joining us in person or virtually for an oral testimony. If you would like to sign up to provide written testimony, use the same sign-up process and email your testimony to ISBE at isbefy26@isbe.net. (Be sure to include your Funding Request Reference Number).

“EBF has also helped make my children’s school budgets more predictable. Before EBF, we worried about teachers being let go in the middle of the school year due to budget cuts. Now, our school budgets are more stable, providing our students with a foundation for them to flourish.” Claiborne Wade (Partner/Parent/CPS)

WHY PROVIDING TESTIMONY IS IMPORTANT AND WHY YOUR STORY MATTERS

This toolkit contains the talking points and a template to craft your individual testimony. Providing testimony allows ISBE board members to hear how their budgetary decisions impact students, educators, and school communities. Your story has the power to persuade and change the level of investment that the state provides our school districts.

When advocates have a strong presence at these hearings, it shows ISBE board members that this is an issue that advocates care about. The louder our voices are collectively, the more powerful our budgetary ask becomes.



Below are talking points that can be used for advocating for an additional \$550 million in EBF. While all these talking points are important, we encourage you to embed two to three of them that complement your testimony.

Importance of EBF Investments

- Decades of research show that funding matters in providing students the high-quality education they need to succeed in school and beyond.
- Since its implementation, the Evidence-Based Funding formula has proven to be a successful tool for increasing funding in K-12 schools while driving resources to the most underfunded districts. To date, the state has invested over \$2.1 billion in new funds through EBF, drastically reducing the number of severely underfunded schools in Illinois.
- Because funds are prioritized for the most severely under resourced districts, EBF investments have cut the number of drastically underfunded districts (those at less than 60% of adequacy) from 168 to zero.
- Yet despite this meaningful progress, in FY25 over 1.3 million of the state's students are still in districts that are underfunded (districts at less than 90% of adequacy).
- I am here to recommend that ISBE requests at least \$550 million in new funding through EBF in FY26 to make progress toward ensuring all students have a high-quality education, regardless of their zip code.

It's Time to Accelerate Our Path to Full Funding

- According to estimates from the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, if we continue to invest an additional \$350 million each year it would take until at least 2035 to fully fund our schools. Assuming CPPRT revenues return closer to pre-pandemic levels, models predict it will take until at least 2038 to fully fund our schools -- meaning if we keep on this path, another entire generation of students will be attending school in an underfunded system.
- Increasing our annual appropriation of new funds to \$550 million will accelerate our pathway to adequate and equitable funding in Illinois, getting us to full funding in half the time and allowing hundreds of thousands more students to benefit from attending fully funded schools.

Fiscal Concerns and Budgetary Pressures

- Over the past 6 years, inflation has driven up the costs of adequately funding a school, and the state's \$350 million investment, while meaningful, doesn't go as far as it once did. What could be purchased with \$350 million in 2017, when the formula was passed, now costs \$450 million. The annual \$350 million increase is no longer an acceptable floor.

- After significant increases resulting from the pandemic totaling more than 1.5 billion, revenue from the Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax or “CPPRT,” which goes directly to school districts, is continuing to plummet this year. The Illinois Department of Revenue predicts a loss of over \$500 million in CPPRT funds going to districts in FY25 (on top of an \$800 million loss in FY24). While this represents a return to normal pre-pandemic levels, the reality is that between federal dollars and CPPRT, districts are feeling significant losses in funds all at the same time.
- Federal stimulus funds are expiring this year and districts are grappling with the need to sustain academic recovery and renewal efforts without this important and significant source of revenue.
- EBF data tells us that districts face a gap to full funding of \$2.7 billion. But there are other cost pressures to consider as well. When we factor in the underfunding of Mandated Categorical programs, other critical PreK-12 funding streams that include transportation, free and reduced price lunch, and important special education costs, our gap to full funding reaches a total of \$3 billion.
- Underfunding of Mandated Categoricals places greater demands on EBF dollars, which districts use to cover the balance. That ultimately leaves less funding free to invest in the evidence-based programming EBF was designed to support. We need to increase our investment in EBF to help districts cover all of the essential costs that they are facing.

Significant and Sustained Investment is Needed to Support Learning Recovery and Renewal

- The academic and social-emotional impacts of the pandemic have been deep and inequitable – and while data shows the state is largely on a path to recovery, there is a long way to go and significant academic and non-academic supports needed along the way. Over the past several years, our districts have identified student needs, stood up new programs, hired additional staff, and worked to continuously improve their recovery efforts. Districts are doing the work – the state must step up to close the gap to adequate funding. It is the least we can do to equip districts to support students whose learning has been impacted by the pandemic.
- Furthermore, as a state, we should be reaching not just towards ‘recovery’ but towards stronger and more equitable student outcomes than we had pre-pandemic. Let’s demonstrate how important that goal is by putting resources where they are needed – in the hands of the most underfunded districts that have been the most deeply impacted by the pandemic.

Equity Imperative

- Equity in education begins by ensuring all schools have the resources, support, and services for their students to thrive.
- Longstanding systemic inequities in K-12 education were made increasingly worse by the pandemic. The EBF formula is the primary tool the state has to target new funds to our most underfunded districts. Funding the EBF with at least \$550M in FY26 is the best way for the state to redress historic inequities.
 - Despite gains made by investments in the formula, students who are Black, Latinx, English Learners, or from low-income households are still the most likely to be in underfunded districts (districts below 90%). Feel free to use any of the following statistics in your testimony:

- 85% of students from low-income households are in underfunded districts compared to 65% of students who are not from low-income households.
 - 82% of English Learners are in underfunded districts, compared to 73% of students who are not English Learners.
 - 88% of Black students and 84% of Latinx students are in underfunded districts, compared to 66% of White students.
 - 88% of students in urban districts and 77% of students in rural/town districts, compared to 59% of students in suburban districts.
- In FY24, my school district [insert district name here] is funded at [X]% of full, adequate funding. That means we have a gap to full funding of \$[X] overall, and \$[X] per pupil. *[Advocates can pull FY25 numbers from [this sheet](#), or we can provide that information upon request.]*

Investments in Education Pay Off

- Investments in education matter – and they pay off.
- It is up to all of us to advocate for the resources that our K-12 districts sorely need. We urge ISBE to put at least \$550 million for Evidence-Based Funding in the FY26 proposed budget.
- We all know the payoff of investments in education can have for our students and families, but we can't forget the payoff for our state – better educational outcomes made possible by adequate, equitable education spending translates to economic growth, increased earnings and decreased unemployment.
- Sufficient school spending has also been tied to reduced crime rates and improved health outcomes over time.

ISBE BUDGET HEARINGS TESTIMONY STRUCTURE AND EXAMPLE

As ISBE is only allowing three minutes for each oral testimony, we recommend the following structure for your testimony:

1. Opening - Introduce yourself, your community, and tell ISBE why you are providing oral testimony. State your clear recommendation of at least \$550 million new dollars for EBF.

Example: I want to thank ISBE on behalf of [organization name] for the opportunity to testify [or offer written testimony]. I am here today to advocate for all Illinois students and recommend that ISBE prioritizes an investment of at least \$550 million in new funding for Evidence-Based Funding in the fiscal year 2026 (FY26) budget.

2. Body Copy - Make your case for why you are recommending ISBE should include at least \$550 million into EBF in its FY26 request. This area can be broken into two parts:

- **Your Story.** Share your community’s story with ISBE. Include how this decision impacts you, your child, students, school, community, or school district. You can also share the impact EBF has had on your community and what increased funding would mean to you. Consider:
 - Why is this investment crucial to the success of those you are advocating for?
 - How has EBF funding helped your child/student/school/district/community? Are there positions you were able to create or fill, programs you were able to invest in or grow, or positive impacts you’re seeing?
 - What budgetary pressures might occur if the state does not increase EBF dollars? Elaborate here on the programming, staff, and supports you anticipate EBF dollars in FY26 will make possible, such as retaining staff, investing in professional development, keeping class sizes manageable, etc.
 - What learning renewal programs or supports will your school or district need to continue investing in to ensure that the learning renewal continues for students, educators, and families in your district? How can the long-term and sustainable funds from EBF be used to decrease the burden of the Federal funding cliff?
- **Additional Facts and Data.** We have provided suggested talking points in the previous section that you can use to craft your testimony.

Example:

Your Story: *Educators and students alike currently have a range of unmet needs that have been exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; we now believe that these needs will continue to be present for many years to come. As a teacher of 21 years, I have witnessed a school year of extreme challenge among students and staff alike. A year like no other. The increase in mental health crises among students and staff who work with them, paired with the ongoing challenges of teaching during a public health crisis, has resulted in schools experiencing fragile ecosystems and a culture of uncertainty, which has unfortunately negatively impacted student learning and social-emotional development. In my role as a program coordinator and mentor to new teachers, I have held the hands of educators who claimed that they may not be able to make it through one more school day and who have questioned their profession choice. This is heartbreaking for our students and for my profession.*

Additional Facts & Data: *Funding the EBF by at least \$550 million is essential to ensuring that all students, regardless of their zip code, have access to resources that will both remediate, as well as accelerate learning. It will also ensure that educators are fully supported in meeting the diverse needs of students through ongoing professional development and that Illinois schools are equipped with adequate tools to provide essential socio-emotional support to their students and staff. Considering the on-going pandemic and exponential increase in the needs of educators and students, we continue to witness a school year filled with greater challenges. To address these challenges, our schools need stable, sustained state investments.*

In my school district, 78% of students come from low-income homes, 20% are English Language Learners, and approximately 87% come from diverse racial backgrounds. In FY23, my district is funded at 75% of full funding...Unfortunately, this has caused my district to prioritize, at the school level, the needs of some students over others and the needs of some educators over others. My district has not been able to adequately address the needs of all students and educators.

I am heartbroken that this is the reality of the educational crisis in our state. However, we can fix it. Our students and educators need adequate funding to provide crucial resources in order to sufficiently rebuild their schools and communities, in a way that is responsive to their varying needs. We need school counselors and social workers, training for our staff in trauma informed practices, and an investment in socio-emotional programs. I believe our students and our schools can and will recover, but we must remain united in our efforts to support Illinois' children. This is why I encourage you to prioritize a request for at least \$550M for EBF to help our students and educators across the state who are continuing to experience the negative effects of their districts falling below full adequate funding.

3. Closing - Conclude your testimony with a soft call to action and thank ISBE for the opportunity to share your testimony.

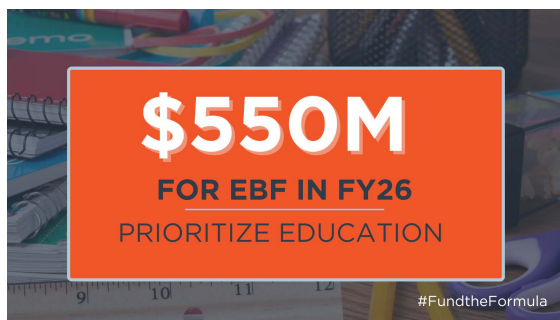
Example: We, the [organization name or your name], appreciate ISBE for the opportunity to testify and your consideration of our recommendation. We sincerely hope you heed our recommendation so that Illinois students receive the quality education they deserve.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY

In the hours leading up to and during each of the hearings, send out the below posts on X, formerly Twitter, by simply clicking "Click to Post." or on Facebook by downloading the graphics and copying the text. Feel free to modify the text in the post as you see fit.

OCTOBER 8

.@ISBENews \$350M is no longer an acceptable floor. Let's make full funding a reality by prioritizing at least \$550M for #EBF in FY26. This is crucial to meet the needs of ALL students, families, and educators across the state. #FundtheFormula



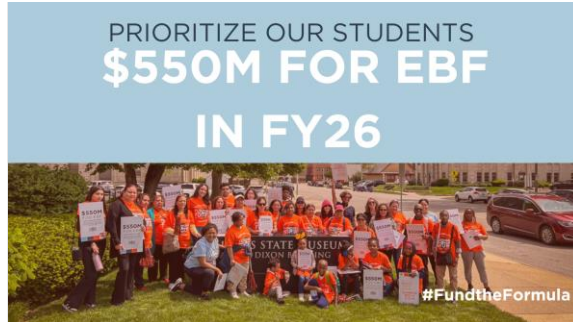
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OCTOBER 10

.@ISBNews, prioritizing \$550M more for #EBF ensures ALL Illinois students have access to a high-quality education. Equitable funding is key to providing the resources our schools need to thrive. Let’s accelerate our timeline and #FundtheFormula!

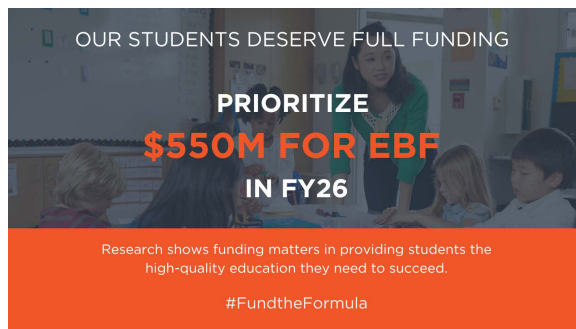


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OCTOBER 28

The formula is working! Let’s keep the momentum going by investing more in our school districts to ensure continued progress for ALL Illinois students. Our students deserve more, @ISBNews, make \$550M more a priority for #EBF in FY26. #FundtheFormula



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