

#FUNDTHEFORMULA CAMPAIGN

JOIN US IN ADVOCATING FOR \$550M FOR SCHOOLS AT THE FY28 ISBE BUDGET HEARINGS

FALL 2026

ISBE TESTIMONY TOOLKIT

Please submit a testimony request today to help ALL Illinois' public school districts reach full funding faster.



Help Us Advocate For \$550M for Schools at the FY28 ISBE Budget Hearings

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) will be hosting a series of hybrid budget hearings this fall. We need the help of advocates to ensure that ISBE prioritizes an investment of at least \$550 million for schools. Our advocacy will focus on ensuring that ISBE supports a \$450M investment of new funds for the K-12 Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula as well as a \$100 million investment into Mandated Categoricals (MCATs) in its FY28 budget request. Please submit a testimony request today to help ALL of Illinois' public school districts reach full funding faster.

In this toolkit you'll find resources like talking points, sample testimony, and background on the Evidence-Based Funding Formula.

01 About the ISBE Hearings

In this toolkit you can find supplemental materials to prepare for your testimony and share with your network.

02 Talking Points

Elevate the need to invest \$550M new dollars into EBF for the upcoming school year. Modify the letter to highlight your experience and let your senator and representative know why funding is crucial for Illinois' children.

03 Sample Testimony

Share this toolkit and messages with members of your community. We need everyone's voice behind the #FundtheFormula campaign!

04 How to Submit Testimony

Review instructions on how to submit a request to provide oral and/or written testimony

05 About FIF & EBF

Learn more about the Funding Illinois' Future coalition and the Evidence-Based Funding Formula

About the ISBE Hearings

For information on budget hearings, visit this link: <https://www.isbe.net/budget>. ISBE will hold 3 Public Hearings to be conducted in-person and virtually:

Date	Time	Format	Sign Up By	Link
October 21	4–7 p.m.	In-Person Springfield	Oct 16, 11:59 p.m.	Sign Up Here
November 5	4–7 p.m.	Virtual	Nov 2, 11:59 p.m.	Sign Up Here
Written Testimony	–	Written	—	Submit here

How to register for both oral and written testimony

Before You Begin

You will need:

- Your contact information
- Your organization or school district information, if applicable
- The funding requests you want to support
- A few sentences about your experience as a parent, educator, student, advocate, or community member
- Your **Funding Request Reference Number** after you submit the ISBE form

You can participate in two ways:

Written testimony: Complete the ISBE Budget Request Form and submit additional written materials by email. **You do not need to attend a hearing to submit written testimony.**

Oral testimony: Complete the ISBE Budget Request Form and register for one of the public hearings where you can provide testimony.

How to register for both oral and written testimony

Step 1: Submit the ISBE online written testimony form

- Open the form [here](#).
- Fill in your personal OR organizational information.
 - If not representing an organization, select **“Self”** or **“Individual.”**
 - Only one speaker per organization is allowed.
- On the right side, select:
 - Select the hearing date you plan to attend if you will provide **oral testimony**, or
 - Select **“I do not plan to attend a budget hearing but still wish to submit written testimony”** if you are submitting **written testimony only**.
- Click **“Add Program Request”** when finished.

Written Testimony Form

Information of Person Providing Testimony

All fields are required in order to proceed to the next section. After the contact information has been completed, click "Add Program Request" to enter information regarding the funding request. You must click "Add Program Request" for each additional funding request.

First Name:	Last Name:
Title/Role:	
Address (street, city, state, ZIP code):	Speaker's Organization:
Authorized Organization (if different than your own):	
Email:	Telephone Number:

 Add Program Request

Budget Hearings: *

Please select one of the options to indicate which budget hearing you intend to speak, or select the last option if you do not want to speak but want to submit a written funding request.

- ☐ October 5 (Virtual): 1-4 p.m.
- ☐ October 21 (Springfield): 4-7 p.m.
- ☐ November 5 (Virtual): 4-7 p.m.
- ☐ I do not plan to attend a budget hearing but still wish to submit written testimony.

 Selection required to submit request.

How to register for both oral and written testimony

Step 2: Add Program Requests

Enter each request one at a time using the program dropdown. Enter the amount under “**Additional Requested Funding.**”

- **EBF:** \$450M
- **Free Lunch & Breakfast:** \$300K
- **Orphanage Tuition:** \$200K
- **Special Ed – Orphanage Tuition:** \$1.3M
- **Special Ed – Private Tuition:** \$18.5M
- **Transportation – Special Ed:** \$56.3M
- **Transportation – Regular/Vocational:** \$23.4M

For your justification: Briefly share **who you are, your connection to Illinois schools, how EBF has impacted your community, remaining needs, and why additional funding matters.** A few personal sentences are enough—you do not need to use policy jargon or include your full testimony.

For each request:

Enter amount → Add justification → Save → Add Program Request → Repeat for each priority you want to support.

How to register for both oral and written testimony

Step 3: Save and Submit

Once you have entered your program requests and submitted the form, ISBE will provide you with a **Funding Request Reference Number**.

SAVE THIS NUMBER!

You will need it to:

- Submit supplemental written testimony
- Register for oral testimony
- Connect your testimony to your funding request

We recommend taking a screenshot or saving the number somewhere you can easily find it.

For written testimony:

You can send supplemental materials to

ISBEFY28@isbe.net. **Be sure to include your Funding Request Reference Number.**

If you are choosing to provide testimony you will need to register using the following sign up links:

Date	Time	Format	Deadline	Link
Oct 21	1-4pm	In-person; Springfield	Oct 16 11:59pm	Register for testimony
Nov 5	4-7pm	Virtual	Nov 2 11:59pm	Register for testimony
Written	—	Written	—	Register for written testimony

Additional Support

Need additional information?

- We're here to help! Feel free to email the Community Engagement team at engagement@advanceillinois.org for support in crafting your testimony.
- District data (e.g., % adequacy):
emoges@advanceillinois.org OR
kstrimbu@advanceillinois.org
- Check out our [Equity Dashboard](#) for a closer look at district-level funding. (Note: the dashboard shows historical data and will be updated upon release of the ISBE report card)



03

Preparing your testimony

Preparing your testimony

Your testimony is important because:

- **Your story has power.** ISBE needs to hear how budget decisions affect students, teachers, and schools.
- **Collective voices make an impact.** The more advocates who show up and provide either written or oral testimony, the stronger our case.
- **EBF drives equity.** Funding based on what schools *actually need* ensures all Illinois students, no matter their zip code, get the education they deserve.

On the next slide you will find some talking points that can be used for advocating for an additional \$550 million for schools. While all these points are important, we encourage you to incorporate two to three of them that best complement your testimony

Importance and Impact of EBF Investments

- 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 \$3.2 billion in new funds through EBF, drastically reducing the number of severely underfunded schools in Illinois.
- Yet despite this meaningful progress, in FY27 over 1.34 million of the state's students are still in districts that are underfunded (districts at less than 90% of adequacy). Academic and financial headwinds like rising costs and growing student need over the past decade demand the state to increase our investment to close existing gaps and ensure all students enroll in well-resourced districts.
 - Moreover, the impact of EBF funding is being slowed by a widening gap between Mandated Categorical spending by districts and reimbursements by the state.

Every Service, Every Student, Every School: Fully Funding Illinois Schools

- EBF investments account for most of the costs of providing education, certain essential and often legally mandated services are covered through separate funding buckets known as Mandated Categoricals, or MCATs. MCATs address critical student needs, both inside and outside of the classroom, including transportation to and from school, free and reduced meals, and special education.
- Every dollar the state underfunds MCATs is a dollar districts need to find elsewhere, putting pressure on Evidence-Based Funding. Underfunded MCATs don't just shortchange student-centered services—they compromise EBF's ability to move school districts closer to adequacy.

Significant Budgetary Pressures for Schools

- Over the past 8 years, inflation has driven up the costs of staffing, transportation, and student-facing resources. The state's \$350 million investment – while meaningful –doesn't go as far as it once did.
- As federal funding instability has become a source of budgetary pressures, state funding must be responsive to our district's needs and increase investments.

Equity Imperative

- Equity in education begins by ensuring all schools have the resources for their students to thrive. Funding Mandated Categoricals gives districts stability in providing essential, required services, while investing in EBF gives districts the ability to actually grow towards adequacy by increasing investing in tutoring, advising, mental health supports, and more. Underfunding one makes both suffer.
- 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:
 - 87% of students from low-income households are in underfunded districts compared to 67% of students who are not from low-income households.
 - 84% of English Learners are in underfunded districts, compared to 75% of students who are not English Learners.
 - 91% of Black students, 85% of Latinx students are in underfunded districts, compared to 67% of White students.
 - 91% of students in urban districts and 81% of students in rural/town districts, compared to 65% of students in suburban districts.
- In FY27, 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 FY27 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 request at least \$550 million for Evidence-Based Funding and Mandated Categoricals in the FY28 proposed budget.

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How to provide testimony

Testimony Outline Example

Please note that **ISBE only allows three minutes for each oral testimony** (testimony can be given both in-person and virtually). To help ensure your testimony is effective and concise, we recommend the following structure:

Part 1 – Opening

- Introduce yourself + community.
- State your ask clearly: *"I urge ISBE to request at least \$550 million for Schools to ensure EBF gets \$450M and MCATs gets \$100M dollars for FY28."*

Part 2 – Your Story

- Share how EBF has impacted your school/district.
- Explain what more funding would make possible (staff, programs, student supports).
- Highlight the risks if funding doesn't increase (cuts, larger class sizes, fewer support).

Part 3 – Closing

- Thank ISBE board members for their time.
- Reiterate your ask for at least \$550M for Schools.

04

About Funding Illinois' Future & EBF

Funding Illinois' Future

#FundTheFormula



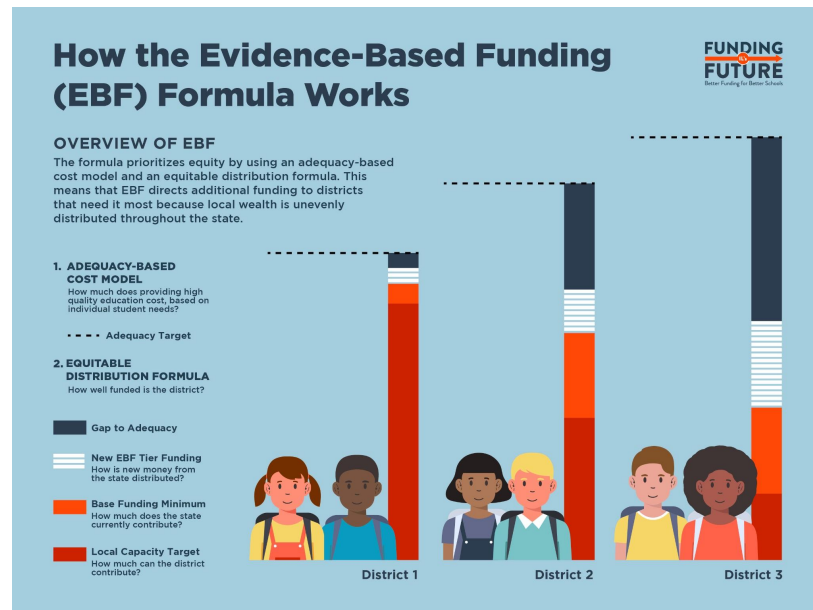
We are a coalition of more than 100 school districts, leaders, parents, educators, community, civic, and faith-based organizations that helped fix Illinois' school funding formula in 2017 with our fierce advocacy for the historic implementation of the K-12 Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula.

Today, we continue our fight for equitable and adequate funding for all K-12 schools and providing every Illinois student with the excellent education they deserve.

About the Evidence-Based Funding Formula (EBF)

In 2017, the landmark Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula overhauled Illinois' existing K-12 education funding system, replacing an outdated and inequitable structure with a formula that prioritizes the state's least well-funded districts, distributes funds based on a research-based estimate of what schools need to fully serve students, and considers differences in student needs across districts.

The Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula calculates education costs based on student needs and distributes new state dollars to school districts furthest from full funding. This is only possible when the state invests additional amounts through the formula each year.



Thank you for your advocacy!