

ISBE's Weekly Message

January 6, 2026

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First- and sixth-grade students in Downers Grove Grade School District 58 are learning valuable lessons through literature. Classes read Jory John's "The Humble Pie," using the story to spark conversations about the importance of kindness and self-reflection.

CELEBRATING A DECADE OF BILITERACY ACHIEVEMENT IN ILLINOIS

Dear Colleagues:

Happy New Year and welcome back. We have a special anniversary to celebrate. Our [recent announcement](#) that 17,111 graduating seniors earned awards for achieving literacy in English plus another language during the 2024-25 school year didn't just break our own state records — it also marked a full decade of Illinois' participation in the Seal of Biliteracy program. This celebration arrives right on time to remind everyone that our great diversity enriches our state, and that this structured opportunity helps pave the way for many of our graduates to problem-solve, collaborate, and lead in our increasingly interconnected world.

The State Seal of Biliteracy is a credential noted on a student's academic transcript and diploma, certifying that the graduate has attained a high level of proficiency in English and another language. In the 2024-25 school year, 10,799 students in 139 districts earned 11,131 Seals (some earned more than one!) in 62 distinct languages. Another 5,933 students in 126 school districts earned a State Commendation Toward Biliteracy —

an honor that recognizes their significant progress toward biliteracy — in 31 distinct languages. And while Spanish was the most common non-English language award, significant numbers of students proved their literacy in Polish, French, Mandarin, Russian, Ukrainian, American Sign Language, and Latin.

One of the major benefits the Seal bestows on students is course credit available at every public community college or university in Illinois. For example, students entering the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with a verified Seal of Biliteracy can receive eight hours of credit (equivalent to the first two levels of a UIUC foreign language course) regardless of the language other than English. Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville offer similar credits. Another benefit is that this credential encourages many students to sustain their heritage language, not just enough for casual family conversations but also for the kind of rigorous reading and writing skills needed to be certified as biliterate. About 47% of graduates who earned the Seal in 2025 had previously been classified as English learners.

I'm very proud that Illinois was one of the first states to opt in to the now-nationwide State Seal of Biliteracy program. We were led by Lincoln-Way Community District #210, which hosted a pilot program during the 2013-14 school year. Back then, the program was such big news, it got featured on the front page of the [Chicago Tribune](#). When the program became official, in 2014-15, Illinois handed out just 503 Seal of Biliteracy credentials, and 214 Commendations. Except for a slight setback during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has grown steadily year after year.

The continued growth of the Seal of Biliteracy program shows that more students than ever — both English learners and traditional world language students — are enjoying the opportunities that multilingualism provides.

If you want to learn more about our State Seal of Biliteracy, visit our [Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy webpage](#).

All my best,

Tony

Dr. Tony Sanders
State Superintendent of Education

**WANT TO SEE YOUR SCHOOL FEATURED AS ISBE'S
PHOTO OF THE WEEK?**

Just follow these three, easy steps!

1. Capture the moment. (Make sure your camera is horizontal!)
2. Ensure all students featured have a signed photo consent form on file.
3. Email the photo (in .jpg format) to photos@isbe.net. Don't forget to include a description of the photo.

HERE'S THE LATEST...

EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS

ILLINOIS TEACHING EXCELLENCE

As part of a strategic realignment, the Illinois Teaching Excellence program is set to transition from the National Board Resource Center (NBRC) at Illinois State University to ISBE by **July 1**. ISBE and the NBRC are working closely to align processes, identify key resources, and engage with current and prospective National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs).

During the 2025-26 school year, the NBRC will continue to support new, retake, and renewal candidates, including mentoring and professional learning opportunities. ISBE will use this year to evaluate the current program and gather educator feedback to streamline processes ahead of the transition.

Starting in the 2026-27 school year, ISBE will assume full responsibility for managing the program. Support for educators pursuing or maintaining National Board Certification will continue, including financial incentives for qualified educators. ISBE remains committed to supporting educators throughout the transition and beyond, ensuring that the program continues to enhance educator effectiveness and support student success.

Throughout the transition, ISBE will provide regular updates and opportunities for feedback on the [National Board for Professional Teaching Standards webpage](#). For immediate questions, please contact NationalBoard@isbe.net.

FINANCE

ESSA RESOURCE ALLOCATION REVIEW – KEY RESOURCES UPDATED

ISBE has updated the [Self-Guided Resource Allocation Review \(RAR\) Toolkit](#) and corresponding dashboard with new materials to support local district teams in completing a self-led RAR. A Resource Allocation Review is a data-informed conversation between key local stakeholders designed to facilitate productive local dialogue about aligning funds to students' needs.

The toolkit includes a [discussion protocol](#), [rubric](#), [supporting research](#), and a data dashboard. This year, the toolkit will also include the RAR Rubric in Practice, a document that expands on the original RAR Rubric with examples to help leaders evaluate their district's resource allocation practices.

The RAR dashboard has also been updated with new visuals examining district enrollment, revenue, and spending categories; additional FTE visuals are forthcoming. The toolkit materials and dashboard can be found on ISBE's [Resource Allocation Reviews webpage](#).

SY 2026-27 EBF FUNDING: HALF-DAY TO FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

The Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) formula creates an Adequacy Target for each district based on total average student enrollment, English learner enrollment, and low-income student count. Kindergarten students are assigned a value of 0.5 in the data if they attend a half day and a value of 1.0 if they attend a full day. Per the EBF statute, a school district may inform the State Board of Education of its intent to convert from half-day to full-day kindergarten. Doing so will prompt conversion of all half-day students to appear as full-day students in the fiscal year 2027 EBF calculation data for both average student enrollment and English learner enrollment. The statutory deadline to report the intent to move to full-day kindergarten instruction is **March 1**.

Any school district that wishes to make this change for the 2026-27 school year must [email ISBE](#) with a board resolution expressing the intent to make the change for the next school year, as well as the minutes from the meeting when the resolution was approved. Contact sff@isbe.net or 217-782-0249 if you have questions.

WELLNESS & STUDENT CARE

KEEP YOUR SCHOOL HEALTHY – REQUEST AN IDPH MOBILE VACCINATION CLINIC

It's not too late to make flu and COVID-19 vaccines more accessible to your school community. The Illinois Department of Public Health's (IDPH) mobile vaccine services will come to your school(s) this winter to help students and families protect themselves. Services are available at no cost to schools, districts, and students and their families, regardless of insurance status. [With rising cases of flu and other respiratory illnesses](#), make sure your school communities have access to these vaccines to stay healthy this winter. [Complete the IDPH Mobile Vaccination Clinic Request Form](#).

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION

2026 ISBE CAREER CONNECTIONS CONFERENCE

Submission forms for the 2026 ISBE Career Connections Conference — including the Call for Proposals, Poster Sessions, and Exhibitors — are now available on the [2026 ISBE Career Connections conference webpage](#). We invite all contributors to share their ideas and professional insights with our community. Forms are due **Jan. 15**.

NUTRITION

KNOW THE SUMMER MEALS REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Section 20 of the [Childhood Hunger Relief Act](#) (105 ILCS 126/20) requires a public school district to implement a summer breakfast and/or lunch program in all schools operating a summer school program where 50% or more of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The meals must be offered for at least the duration of the school's summer school program.

Please email the ISBE Nutrition Department at cnp@isbe.net if you need assistance determining free and reduced-price meal eligibility data.

Feb. 15 is the deadline to develop and keep on file the district plan to conduct a summer lunch and/or breakfast program for each school that has a summer school program and where at least 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

To opt out of this state law, a school district must petition its regional superintendent of schools by **Jan. 15**. The Childhood Hunger Relief Act states, “The petition shall include all legitimate costs associated with implementing and operating a summer food service program, the estimated reimbursement from state and

federal sources, and any unique circumstances the school district can verify that exist that would cause the implementation and operation of such a program to be cost prohibitive.”

Resources:

- [Summer Food Service Mandate \(Public Act 096-0734\) Timeline](#)
- [Find Your Regional Office of Education/Intermediate Service Center](#)
- [Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility Data](#)
- [Summer Food Service Program](#)
- [Seamless Summer Option](#)
- [School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook](#)

IN BRIEF

DISTRICT OPPORTUNITIES

FREE CARBON-FREE ASSESSMENTS FOR ILLINOIS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

K-12 public school districts can access a no-cost, expert-led report to help reduce energy usage, discover financial incentives to assist with capital projects, and improve learning environments through the Illinois Public Schools Carbon-Free Assessment (PSCFA) Program. The program evaluates each district building across key areas: energy efficiency, building envelope improvements, solar readiness, electrification of heating and transportation, and how to create healthier learning environments for students.

Benefits include:

- Energy and cost savings: Identify low- and no-cost upgrades that reduce electricity and natural gas usage.
- Healthier learning environments: Improve indoor air quality and overall comfort for students and staff.
- Facility improvements: Detailed analysis of what is needed for upgrades to HVAC, insulation, and building envelope.
- Future readiness: Plan for solar, electric heating, and electric vehicle infrastructure.
- Carbon reduction: Target measures to lower emissions and support sustainability goals.

To learn more and enroll your district, visit the [PSCFA webpage](#).

FEATURED ISBE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

- [Chief Communications Officer #1963](#)
- [Chief Governmental Relations Officer #1964](#)
- [Learning and Development Lead \(Organizational Development Lead #1959\)](#)