

ISBE's Weekly Message

April 28, 2026

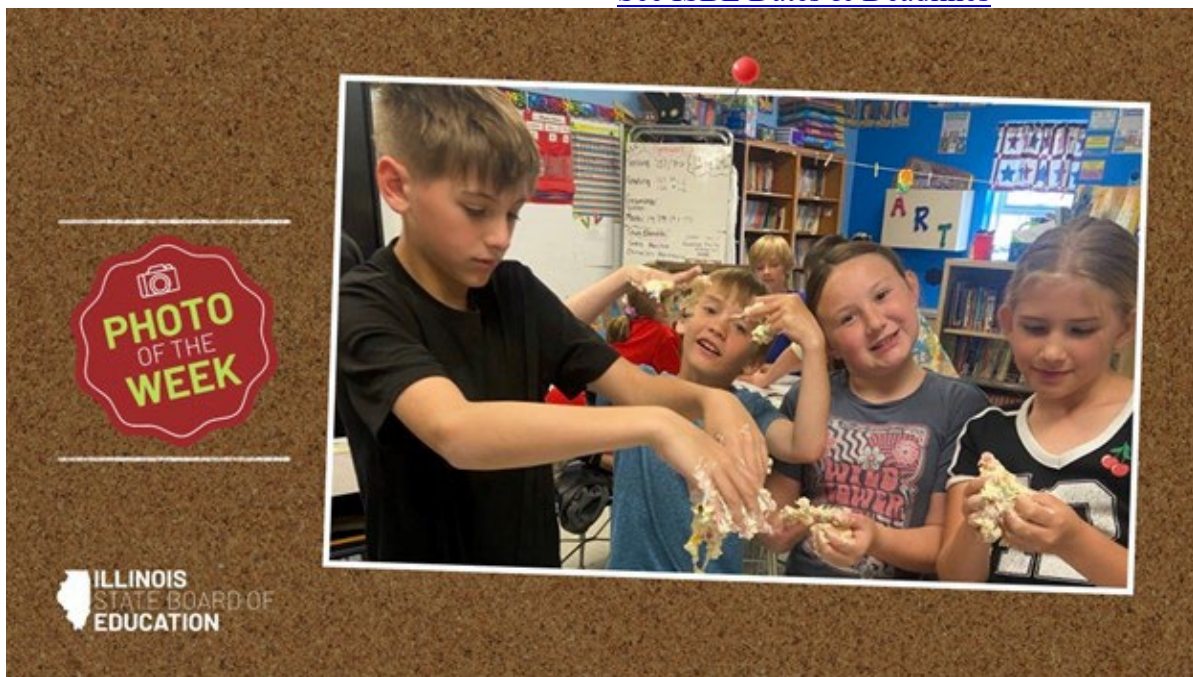
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Hands-on learning tastes pretty good for fourth- graders at Coulterville Unit School District 1. Students used Rice Krispies, assorted candy, and melted marshmallows in an edible lab to see exactly how different minerals combine to form rocks.

GUEST COLUMN: AN AUBURN ALUM CREATES A GAME-CHANGING PROGRAM TO BOOST ATTENDANCE

As we head toward the final weeks of the school year, attendance matters more than ever. When we heard about the new program created in [Rockford Public Schools' Auburn High School](#), we asked Superintendent Dr. Ehren Jarrett to share it with you.

It all begins with showing up — getting students to come to school on time and attend class. Luckily, a small team of specialists here at Rockford Public Schools' Auburn High School have come up with a program that's working to do just that. It's built on the ideas of Jeremy Coleman, an Auburn alum who returned to his alma mater this school year as a Behavior Intervention Specialist.

During November's data review session, "JC" (as he's known to everyone at Auburn) saw the attendance numbers and was shocked not only by the higher rate among Black students but also by the realization that the school had no intervention in place. That weekend, the 1989 movie "[Lean on Me](#)" happened to pop up on his TV, and by Monday morning, JC had come up with the bones of a plan. He presented his idea to Nicole

Brady, assistant principal for the freshman academy at Auburn, and within a matter of weeks, they turned JC's ideas into their own Lean On Me program.

It's a system of five intentional, relationship-building opportunities — including an accountability check-in, a skill-building activity, and a weekly phone call to parents recognizing the student's effort and growth — that take a total of about 45 minutes per student per week. In December, Lean On Me launched with a list of about 50 students struggling with attendance, behavior, and grades, and matched each student with either JC, Ms. Brady, or one of the 10 other staff members who agreed to serve as "champions." The students start with a sheet documenting grades, attendance, an affirmation, and an incentive that can be earned through measurable progress in self-regulation, consistent attendance, or conflict navigation. Meanwhile, the champions also learn "what makes each student tick, and what ticks them off," as Ms. Brady says, to help gain the student's trust. After six weeks, students graduate from Lean On Me and have the opportunity to recruit another student into the program.

The program can also include academic tutoring, but it's not the first priority. JC and Ms. Brady designed Lean On Me to remove the barriers that prevent students from engaging in the first place. They say their program isn't about saving students, but rather about standing beside them long enough for them to save themselves. Thirty students have completed the program so far.

If you've been following the evolution of ISBE's [Accountability Redesign](#), you've probably noticed that the term "chronic absenteeism" has been replaced with the more positive metric "consistent attendance." It's a major factor in your school's summative designation because, as we all know, attendance is a major factor in student success. Summer is just around the corner. The time to show up, and be fully present, is now.

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...

FINANCE

FY 2027 EVIDENCE-BASED FUNDING DATA SETS AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW

ISBE is in the process of finalizing data that will be utilized in the fiscal year 2027 Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) calculations. These data sets are posted on the [EBF Distribution webpage](#) in the Data Sets dropdown. The following data sets have been posted and are available for review:

- [Calendar Year 2025 Corporate Personal Property Replacement Tax Revenue](#)
- [Preliminary Tax Year 2024 Limiting Rates](#)
- [Preliminary Tax Year 2024 Original Equalized Assessed Valuation Amounts](#)
- [Preliminary Tax Year 2024 Tax Rates by Fund](#)

District administrators are encouraged to review their data now through May to ensure accuracy prior to EBF calculations being completed. EBF utilizes over 17,000 unique variables; corrections made by one district may result in changes to all districts' results.

Contact SFF@isbe.net or 217-782-0249 if you have any questions.

STANDARDS & INSTRUCTION

STRENGTHEN LOCAL LITERACY SYSTEMS AT THE 2026 ILLINOIS LITERACY INSTITUTE

The 2026 Illinois Literacy Institute is a multiday professional learning experience for school and district teams focused on comprehensive, evidence-based instruction aligned to the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan. Through collaborative learning, participants will deepen their understanding of key literacy practices and develop actionable plans to support local implementation.

Two strands are available:

- Elementary teams (**June 15-16, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**) will explore the essential components of early literacy, examine curriculum and assessment alignment, and engage in guided team planning to build or refine local literacy plans that support all learners. Cost: \$50. [Register for the Literacy Institute \(elementary\)](#) through **June 8 at 9:59 p.m.**
- Middle and high school teams (**June 17-18, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**) will apply disciplinary literacy and writing practices; strengthen support for students in reading, writing, and thinking across the disciplines; and collaborate to build instructional systems connected to the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan. Cost: \$50. [Register for the Literacy Institute \(middle and high school\)](#) through **June 10 at 9:59 p.m.**

The institute will be held at the Illinois State University Alumni Center in Normal.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

DATA STRATEGIES & ANALYTICS

SY 2026-27 ENTITY PROFILE SYSTEM WEBINAR

The school year 2026-27 Entity Profile System webinar, on **May 7 at 10 a.m.**, will cover:

- How to update and verify your organization's information in the Entity Profile System (EPS), including grade changes, personnel updates, building additions and closures, and more
- Changes in EPS for the upcoming school year

- Region County District Type School codes
- What constitutes grades served in a school

[Register for the SY 2026-27 Entity Profile System webinar](#). A video recording and PDF version of this presentation will be subsequently posted on the [ISBE Entity Profile System webpage](#).

If you have questions about EPS, email EPSChange@isbe.net with your organization's name in the subject line. Include a detailed description of your issue and screenshots. You may also call 312-814-9192 for assistance.

FUNDING & DISBURSEMENTS

FY 2027 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT OF 1965 PRELIMINARY ALLOCATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

Fiscal year 2027 Every Student Succeeds Act preliminary Title I, Part A; Title II, Part A; and Title IV, Part A allocations for all eligible Local Education Agencies are available on the ISBE [Titles IA, IIA and IVA \(ESSA\) Funding webpage](#). If you have questions, please contact title@isbe.net or 217-785-1969.

SAFE & HEALTHY CLIMATE

FREE MOBILE VACCINATION CLINIC OFFERED STATEWIDE

Do you have students in need of vaccinations? Help students and families get easy access to vaccines by bringing mobile vaccination services provided by the Illinois Department of Public Health and Chicago Internal Medicine Practice and Research to your school. Mobile vaccination services are available statewide now and throughout the summer at no cost to schools, districts, and to students and their families, regardless of insurance status. [Request mobile vaccine services](#) to get students up to date and protected before the end of the school year or during the summer for back-to-school events.

STANDARDS & INSTRUCTION

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS REVIEW

ISBE is seeking educators and stakeholders to participate in a one-day English Language Arts (ELA) Standards Review session on **June 25 from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.** at the Bloomington-Normal Marriott Hotel and Conference Center.

Selected participants will be assigned to grade-band and strand-specific teams to review the current Illinois Learning Standards for ELA and identify areas for clarification, refinement, and improved coherence. This effort is focused on targeted updates and is not a full rewrite of the standards.

We are seeking a range of perspectives, including classroom teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, and higher education partners. District and school teams are encouraged to apply.

Space is limited. Please indicate interest by completing the [ELA Standards Review interest form](#) by **May 6**.

IN BRIEF

EDUCATOR OPPORTUNITIES

POSITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORTS RECOGNITION

The [Midwest Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\) Network](#) facilitates a statewide recognition process designed to acknowledge and celebrate a school's efforts on PBIS implementation based on the school's self-assessment. [Apply for Midwest PBIS Network's Illinois Schools Recognition](#) to reflect on the fidelity of your implementation, celebrate successes, and, most importantly, create an action plan for ongoing improvement. Applications are due **May 1**.

MAKING CONNECTIONS – ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ADHD, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, & OPPOSITIONAL BEHAVIOR

Teachers are often the first to notice mental health problems in children. In the [Making Connections – Accommodations for ADHD, Anxiety, Depression, & Oppositional Behavior webinar](#), **April 29 at 3:30 p.m.**, participants will:

- Learn how to recognize symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, depression, and oppositional behavior in the classroom
- Understand the association between mental health symptoms and school functioning and accommodation recommendations
- Discuss experiences and questions related to supporting student mental health in the classroom with other educators statewide and mental health providers

Educators will also learn how to create and implement Individualized Education Programs and 504 plans with high-quality evidence-based accommodations for ADHD, anxiety, depression, and oppositional behavior, as well as how to collaborate with mental health providers to support students' needs.

Participants will earn one Continuing Education Unit or Professional Development Hour.

TEACH PLUS FELLOWSHIPS

Teach Plus Illinois is offering three different fellowships for educators in the 2026-27 school year:

- The [Chicago Change Agent Fellowship](#) is for outstanding teachers who want to address an issue that affects students across their school. Together with their principal, the teacher leader identifies a problem of practice and works with other teachers and a teacher leadership coach to tackle this challenge. Apply by **May 1 at 11:59 p.m.** For more information, email cjameau@TeachPlus.org or view the [Chicago Change Agent Fellowship informational video](#).
- [Illinois Affinity Group Facilitators](#) seek to cultivate inclusive, affirming, and supportive spaces, shaped by and for educators of color. Affinity Groups, rooted in an asset-based understanding of diversity, will support educators in navigating and improving their school environments and will be connected to a larger network to build alliances and address systemic issues. Apply by **May 22 at 11:59 p.m.** For more information, email cwilliams@TeachPlus.org or view the [Illinois Affinity Group Facilitators informational video](#).
- [Project Connect Plus](#) is a free professional learning opportunity for kindergarten teachers to learn how to use powerful and playful instructional routines to deepen children's skills, knowledge, and

understanding in language, literacy, and early mathematics. The routines can be easily incorporated into classrooms regardless of program type or school curricula. Apply by **May 22 at 11:59 p.m.** For more information, email ritzkowich@TeachPlus.org.

All Teach Plus programs are highly selective leadership opportunities for outstanding teachers looking to expand their influence without having to leave the classroom. They span the 2026-27 school year and offer selected teachers a stipend for their time and work.

I-GROW SUMMIT

The [I-Grow Summit](#) will be held **April 29-30** in Normal. This annual event is the first in Illinois with the specific goal of growing, retaining, and recruiting educational leaders and teachers of color. Participants can earn up to six Professional Development Hours.

FEATURED ISBE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

- [Compliance Monitor \(Principal Consultant #1708\)](#)
- [Educator Preparation and Licensure \(Principal Consultant #390\)](#)
- [Child and Adult Care Food Program Administrator \(Principal Consultant #1140\)](#)