

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable JB Pritzker, Governor
The Honorable Emanuel “Chris” Welch, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Tony McCombie, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President
The Honorable John Curran, Senate Minority Leader

FROM: Dr. Tony Sanders 
State Superintendent of Education

DATE: June 16, 2026

SUBJECT: 2025-2026 Strategic Plan Status Report

The Illinois State Board of Education respectfully submits a status report on ISBE’s Strategic Plan to the Governor and General Assembly to fulfill the requirements of 105 ILCS 5/2-3.47a.

This report is transmitted on behalf of the state superintendent of education. For additional information, please contact Cynthia Lund, Chief Governmental Relations Officer, at 217-782-6510 or clund@isbe.net.

cc: Secretary of the Senate
Clerk of the House
Legislative Research Unit
State Government Report Center

Illinois State Board of Education

Strategic Plan 2025-26 Annual Status Report



Introduction

As required in [105 ILCS 5/2-3.47a](#), the State Board of Education shall develop and maintain a continuing comprehensive strategic plan for elementary and secondary education. The 2024-2027 Strategic Plan was approved by the State Board of Education on January 24, 2024. The plan consists of goals for equity, student learning, learning conditions, and elevating educators. The plan acknowledges that every district contains unique assets and requires different approaches to support and develop these assets

The Strategic Plan leverages the wide range of talents and interests of ISBE staff, practicing educators, and stakeholders and considers how best to support agency work.

This report provides an update on the status of the 2024-2027 Strategic Plan from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

The goals identified in the 2024-2027 ISBE Strategic Plan are:

Equity Goal 1 – An Equity Impact Analysis Tool will guide all programmatic decisions and communications provided to stakeholders with special attention given to confronting and resolving historical inequities.

Equity Goal 2 – An Equity Journey Continuum will be used to publicly indicate where each Illinois school district is on its equity journey.



**Goal 1:
Student
Learning –**

All students will receive a high-quality education with access to appropriate resources and supports to increase their knowledge, skills, and opportunities so they graduate equipped to pursue a successful future.



**Goal 2:
Learning
Conditions –**

In partnership with its stakeholders, ISBE will advocate for the necessary resources to create safe, healthy, and welcoming learning environments that meet the unique academic, social, and emotional needs of every student.



**Goal 3:
Elevating
Educators –**

Illinois' diverse student population will have educators who are prepared through multiple pathways and supported in and celebrated for their effectiveness in providing every child a high-quality education that meets their needs.

Goal
E.1

Equity Impact Analysis Tool

An Equity Impact Analysis Tool will guide all programmatic decisions and communications provided to stakeholders with special attention given to confronting and resolving historical inequities.

Internal Objectives

E.1.1

By the end of fiscal year 2025, every ISBE exempt and non-exempt employee will be trained on how to use and document usage of the Equity Impact Analysis Tool.

E.1.2

By the end of FY 2025, the Equity Impact Analysis Tool will be built into all new Contract Authorization Forms (CAF) and Grant Authorization Forms (GAF), so all major financial decisions take into consideration historical inequities.

E.1.3

By the end of FY 2025, the Equity Impact Analysis Tool will be built into all Board memos, so all official actions by the agency take into consideration historical inequities.

External Objectives

E.1.1

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will share its Equity Impact Analysis Tool and training modules as a model for schools and districts to use in their own decision-making.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE held monthly Equity Impact Analysis Tool meetings to support staff training on the Equity Impact Analysis Tool.

The Equity Impact Analysis Tool is integrated into the Contract Authorization Forms and select grant applications now incorporate its guiding questions. ([Equity Information and Resources](#))

ISBE developed and published Equity Impact Analysis Tool resources and training on its [Equity Information and Resources](#) webpage to advance equity-centered decision-making in schools and districts. ([Equity Impact Analysis Tool](#) Fact Sheet)

Goal
E.2

Equity Journey Continuum

An Equity Journey Continuum will be used to publicly indicate where each Illinois school district is on its equity journey.

Internal Objectives

E.2.1

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE staff will use the Equity Journey Continuum to guide the distribution of resources.

E.2.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE staff will begin a continual cycle of reviewing data produced by the Equity Journey Continuum.

External Objectives

E.2.3

By the end of FY 2025, the Equity Journey Continuum will be added to the School Improvement Needs Assessment.

E.2.4

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will develop a suite of resources to assist schools and districts in integrating their Equity Journey Continuum results into their continuous improvement planning.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE, in collaboration with Loyola University, developed Equity Journey Continuum fact sheets and supporting resources.

- [Introducing the Equity Journey Continuum](#)
- [Four Steps Along the Equity Journey Continuum](#)
- [How to Use the Equity Journey Continuum](#)
- [How to Craft Your Equity Journey Narrative](#)

ISBE established monthly Equity Journey Continuum meetings to support staff training and implementation. ([Data Elements on the Equity Journey Continuum](#))

The Equity Journey Continuum is integrated into the School Improvement Needs Assessment and is facilitated by the American Institutes for Research to support schools in status during their planning year.

ISBE, in collaboration with Loyola University, developed a resource guide for school districts on the Equity Journey Continuum. ([Loyola University IRJ DEI Resource Guide for School Districts](#))

Goal
1.1**Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan**

ISBE will work with stakeholders to curate resources and develop instructional guides using evidence-based strategies to support the teaching of literacy in two or more languages.

**Internal Objectives****1.1.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE staff will be trained on the literacy plan.

External Objectives**1.1.2**

By the end of FY 2024, ISBE, in partnership with stakeholders, will develop and post the following:

- A rubric to evaluate and select evidence-based, culturally inclusive core reading curriculum.
- A comprehensive, district wide literacy plan template.
- A guidance document on evidence-based practices for training and deploying equity-oriented literacy coaches.

FY26 Accomplishment

The ISBE Literacy Team provided tiered support to ISBE staff, specifically tailored to each department, in order to effectively support the implementation of the [Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan](#) in school districts throughout Illinois.

ISBE, in partnership with stakeholders, provided the following resources to support the [Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan](#):

- [Local Literacy Plan Template](#)
- [Coaching Guidance Presentation](#) and [Literacy Coaching Checklist](#)
- [Literacy-Specific Addendum to the Curriculum Evaluation Tool](#)

Goal
1.2**Statewide System of Support**

ISBE will work with stakeholders to develop a continuous improvement model and make resources available to support its implementation for all schools in Illinois.

**External Objectives****1.2.1**

By the end of FY 2024, ISBE will work with stakeholders to develop a continuous improvement model.

1.2.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will promote the continuous improvement model through a road show modeled after the state literacy plan rollout.

1.2.3

By the end of FY 2025, in collaboration with the Illinois Association of School Boards, ISBE will develop training on continuous improvement and student outcomes for district school board members, available to anyone on demand.

1.2.4

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will develop a menu of continuous improvement resources that are responsive to the unique needs of schools.

FY26 Accomplishment

During the 2025-26 school year, ISBE strengthened implementation of the [Statewide Framework for Success](#) by enhancing the shared [School and District Improvement webpage](#) and expanding access to partner-developed resources.

During the 2025-26 school year, ISBE and its partners sustained [tiered resources](#) aligned to the [Statewide System of Success](#). These supports address diverse school needs and include a fully accessible, no-cost option for any school or district.

During the 2025-26 school year, ISBE, in collaboration with the Illinois Association of School Administrators and the Illinois Association of School Boards, continued to offer a no-cost online training module for school board members focused on school improvement and student outcomes.

- [Improving Student Outcomes video](#)
- [Improving Student Outcomes presentation](#)
- [School Board Monthly Topics and Tasks](#)

ISBE developed a menu of differentiated continuous improvement resources to meet diverse school needs and support targeted improvement efforts.

- [On-Demand Learning Series](#)
- [A Year in the Life of School Improvement – Getting Started with School Improvement](#)
- [A Year in the Life of School Improvement – All Schools Implementation Years](#)

Goal
1.3**Regional Offices of Education (ROEs)/Intermediate Service Centers (ISCs)/Rural Leadership Development**

ISBE and ROEs/ISCs will partner to develop a statewide plan to support all districts in school improvement efforts.

**External Objectives****1.3.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE, in partnership with ROEs/ISCs, will provide instructional coaches to schools in improvement status.

1.3.2

By the end of FY 2026, a plan will be developed to provide various resources through ROEs/ISCs to support improvement in all districts, with a special emphasis on increasing support to schools in Targeted status.

FY26 Accomplishment

During the 2025–26 school year, ISBE concluded the provision of instructional coaching support to ROEs/ISCs, which provided targeted assistance to schools in improvement status. This work strengthened regional capacity and supported school-level improvement efforts.

ISBE provided support through ROEs/ISCs, prioritizing schools in Targeted status. Supports include virtual office hours, webinars, Special Education partnerships, and practical AI tools for school leaders.

Goal
1.4**Higher
Education**

ISBE will partner with other state agencies and stakeholders to maintain and develop high-quality educator preparation programs.

**External Objectives****1.4.1**

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will identify high-performing programs via data submitted by institutions of higher education to the Illinois Educator Preparation Profiles system. ISBE will complete an evaluation of the effective recruitment and retention practices utilized by high-performing programs in high-need subject areas and share this information with all programs and other relevant state agencies.

1.4.2

By the end of FY 2027, ISBE, in consultation with stakeholders, will develop scoring criteria for all educator preparation programs.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE developed a best practice guide to be shared with institutions of higher education and other community members.

Goal
1.5**ISBE Culture
of Learning**

ISBE will promote equitable professional learning opportunities in support of an environment where shared decision-making and accountability are grounded upon the diverse perspectives and expertise of staff.

**Internal Objectives****1.5.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will develop new professional learning offerings in support of employees' professional responsibilities. ISBE will review the offerings annually.

1.5.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will develop training aligned to best practices for adult learning for new and existing supervisors, directors, and executive directors on core operational duties and systems (e.g., GAF, CAF, grant management, MIDAS, Request for Sealed Proposals). The training will be required as a part of new manager onboarding.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE continued delivering monthly foundational trainings to provide essential overviews that support new staff in understanding core systems and processes.

ISBE continued delivering monthly application trainings to support newly hired management and designated staff in developing role-specific skills.

Goal
1.6**Leadership
Development**

ISBE will identify and provide opportunities for staff to develop specific leadership tenets necessary to galvanize action and effect change throughout the organization.

**Internal Objectives****1.6.1**

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will offer professional learning on a continual basis to further develop existing leadership through cross departmental collaboration.

1.6.2

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will provide leadership training and leadership pathways to create a pipeline for future leaders.

FY26 Accomplishment

In partnership with external providers including the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR), Illinois Department of Revenue (IDOR), and Illinois Department of Innovation & Technology (DoIT), ISBE offered year-round leadership courses to support ongoing professional growth.

ISBE established a Lead Cohort to provide structured leadership training and create a pipeline of future leaders within the organization.

Goal
2.1**Student Safety
and Wellness**

ISBE will work with external stakeholders to create a developmentally appropriate Resiliency Toolkit.

**External Objectives****2.1.1**

By the end of FY 2024, ISBE, with assistance from external stakeholders and in partnership with ROEs/ISCs, will pilot the Resilient Schools Certification program.

2.1.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will work with external stakeholders to create a developmentally appropriate Resiliency Toolkit for students and educators.

2.1.3

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE, in consultation with external stakeholders, will develop resources to support the implementation of mental health screenings in schools.

2.1.4

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE, in partnership with external stakeholders, will update the Illinois Learning Standards for Social-Emotional Learning.

FY26 Accomplishment

At the end of FY 2025, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Center for Childhood Resilience at Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago launched the statewide rollout of Resilience-Supportive Schools Illinois (RSSI) – a free, data-informed initiative that provides schools with tools to strengthen student and educator mental health and resilience.

RSSI builds on the Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH) initiative, which has led to reduced chronic absenteeism, improved teacher retention, decreased the use of suspensions, and improved schools' capacity for trauma-responsiveness for participating schools.

Nearly 400 schools participated in the pilot year of this free program. To date, over 800 schools have participated in this project.

In the spring of 2025, ISBE released the Resiliency Toolkit. This resource was designed to promote resiliency in safe and supportive school and caregiving environments. This thoughtfully curated collection offers developmentally appropriate knowledge, tools, and guidance to help students, caregivers, and school personnel navigate both everyday challenges and broader systemic issues. The toolkit brings together best practices, reliable information, and trusted external resources to empower users as they identify needs, explore effective strategies, and access additional support.

During the winter of FY 2025, ISBE gathered feedback from internal and external constituents on the draft of the [Resiliency Toolkit](#) to improve the tool based upon user feedback prior to its release in June 2025. In the spring of FY 2026, ISBE once again surveyed the community for feedback for any necessary revisions/updates to the tool.

ISBE has spent [three years collaborating](#) with the Children's Behavioral Health Transformation Team in the Office of the Governor and other experts and stakeholders to develop a phased implementation plan to support school districts in meeting this new requirement. The latest [School Screening Readiness Report](#) analyzes the results of the readiness assessment we conducted to determine each school district's capacity to administer universal mental health screening, addressing resource, technology, training, and infrastructure needs. On or before Sept. 1, 2026, ISBE will publish non-regulatory guidance on Universal Mental Health Screening (UMHS) as required by statute.

ISBE will release updated Illinois Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards before the end of FY 2026, marking the first revision to the standards since their original adoption in 2005. The updated framework reorganizes Illinois' SEL standards into five core competencies aligned with current best practices and establishes revised, age-appropriate benchmarks for students from kindergarten through 12th grade. Developed through a multi-year collaboration involving educators, school leaders, professional organizations, and national experts in student learning and development, the revised standards reflect advances in research and classroom practice achieved over the past two decades. ISBE convened a statewide SEL Standards Revision Committee in fall 2024 and hosted public webinars that drew feedback from nearly 1,000 educators and community members.

Goal
2.2**Statewide
System of Support**

ISBE will work with ROEs/ISCs to develop and deliver professional learning opportunities promoting the implementation of the Resiliency Toolkit.

**External Objectives****2.2.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE, in collaboration with ROEs/ISCs, will hold an annual wellness conference.

2.2.2

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE, in collaboration with ROEs/ISCs, will increase the number of school personnel who receive professional learning about resilience-related topics.

FY26 Accomplishment

May 4-6, the Wellness and Student Care Department hosted a School Wellness Conference in collaboration with the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools. In only its second year, this conference attracted 430 participants, up from 365 in 2025, and included 50 breakout sessions on topics such as nutrition, physical education, social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and school safety.

ISBE meets bi-monthly with SEL Hubs, and once per month with Resilience Education to Advance Community Healing (REACH) and SEL Hubs, to discuss progress/strategies on increasing the number of school personnel who receive professional learning about resilience-related topics. ISBE utilizes the Weekly Message to publicize these services and held the School Wellness Conference in 2025 and again in 2026 to increase participation.

Goal
2.3**Operations**

ISBE will develop a tool to model equitable practices in day-to-day operations, recruitment, retention, hiring, promotion, and evaluation.

**External Objectives****2.3.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will partner with an external vendor to identify and administer an employee feedback survey.

2.3.2

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will design and implement a program in response to employee feedback surveys.

2.3.3

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will design and implement an equitable program that allows exposure to different departments and roles to enhance capacity and provide internal coaching to help people advance within the agency.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE, in partnership with Illuminative Strategies, launched an employee survey to gather feedback on organizational culture and climate.

In response to employee feedback gathered through the survey, ISBE developed and launched the LEAD ISBE leadership cohort, established the Organizational Development Department, and introduced both application and foundational trainings.

Goal
2.4**Budget
Systems**

ISBE will model a budgeting process aligned with agency priorities and inclusive of inter and intra-departmental needs.

**External Objectives****2.4.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will work with stakeholders as necessary to complete an assessment that identifies target processes, current state understanding of each process and associated systems, and opportunities to improve. ISBE will make recommendations for future implementation related to financial systems as a whole.

2.4.2

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will prioritize a second group of processes and associated systems and will work with stakeholders as necessary to complete an assessment that identifies the processes, current state understanding of each process and associated systems, and opportunities to improve. ISBE will make recommendations for future implementation. ISBE will implement new systems and processes within allowable timelines.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE, in partnership with Illuminative Strategies, is developing a modern grant system for pilot implementation in FY 2027, with a full rollout anticipated by FY 2028.

ISBE, in partnership with Illuminative Strategies continues to identify, validate, and confirm processes for grant monitoring.

Goal
2.5**IT/Infrastructure
Investment**

ISBE will analyze current systems to improve efficiency and collaboration while prioritizing and investing in an IT infrastructure equipped to support the needs of districts, partners, and the agency.

**External Objectives****2.5.1**

By the end of fiscal year 2024, ISBE will conduct an internal assessment to identify redundancies and opportunities for improvement.

2.5.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will develop a report that identifies redundancies and opportunities for improvement.

2.5.3

By the end of FY 2027, ISBE will have completed the first phase of a comprehensive business mapping process that will provide pathways to improve efficacy and efficiency within our systems.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE, in partnership with Illuminative Strategies, continues to identify, validate, and confirm processes tied to grant and contract monitoring.

Goal
3.1**Higher
Education**

ISBE will work with institutions of higher education to develop professional learning communities of practice to promote the use of resources for literacy instruction.

**External Objectives****3.1.1**

By the end of FY 2025, in collaboration with institutions of higher education, ISBE will develop Communities of Practice promoting effective literacy instruction in educator preparation programs.

3.1.2

By the end of FY 2027, ISBE will conduct a program evaluation to determine the extent to which instruction in educator preparation programs aligns to literacy preparation standards and the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan.

FY26 Accomplishment

The Standards & Instruction Department and Educator Effectiveness Department collaborated to provide three Communities of Practice meetings to promote effective literacy instruction in educator preparation programs.

Goal
3.2**Professional Learning**

ISBE will work in collaboration with stakeholders to research, identify, and pilot innovative models of education preparation.

**External Objectives****3.2.1**

By the end of FY 2024, based on continuing research of educator preparation programs in other states, ISBE and stakeholders will recommend additional innovative educator preparation models.

3.2.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will support apprenticeship pilots for institutions of higher education.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE advanced Illinois' educator pipeline by spearheading legislation to enable community colleges to partner with institutions of higher education with approved educator preparation programs to support the transfer between institutions as well as articulation of "Paraprofessional to PEL" programs through which individuals working as paraprofessionals can obtain a PEL to serve as a teacher of record (see [Public Act 104-0128](#)). ISBE also engaged in a multi-state Community of Practice to adopt effective preparation strategies, advertised other models of [innovative models of educator preparation](#) on the ISBE website, and launched a grant to pilot teacher apprenticeship programs.

ISBE developed a best practice guide based on information learned during the pilot.

Goal
3.3**Teacher Vacancy Grant**

ISBE will partner with districts in need to highlight equitable practices in recruitment and retention of educators.

**External Objectives****3.3.1**

By the end of FY 2024, ISBE will continue to support districts participating in the Teacher Vacancy Grant with the implementation of equitable, evidence-based strategies through Communities of Practice.

3.3.2

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will research effective practices among districts participating in the Teacher Vacancy Grant.

3.3.3

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will share information on effective practices with districts throughout the state.

3.3.4

By the end of FY 2027, ISBE will provide evidence of a stronger teacher pipeline, as evidenced by the 2026 Educator Supply and Demand report.

FY26 Accomplishment

ISBE coordinated regular Communities of Practice and a Teacher Vacancy Grant Summit in support of participating districts. The summit and Communities of Practice provided opportunities for grantees to collaborate in real time. Recordings and resources are posted on the [Teacher Vacancy Grant website](#).

ISBE partnered with the Illinois Workforce and Education Research Collaborative to evaluate the grant program and release two studies:

- [How Illinois Districts are Addressing Teacher Shortages: An Evaluation of the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program](#)
- [Early Teacher Staffing Trends: An Evaluation of the Teacher Vacancy Grant Pilot Program](#)

The second Teacher Vacancy Grant Summit occurred on May 19, 2026. Effective practices to help educators recognize, recruit, and rise were shared with both grantee and non-grantee districts.

Goal
3.4**Succession
Planning**

ISBE will work collaboratively to develop a template for succession planning utilized by every department.

**Internal Objectives****3.4.1**

By the end of FY 2025, ISBE will develop a template that each department will complete to document protocols, processes, and procedures.

3.4.2

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will develop department onboarding manuals, timelines, and relevant programmatic information for new employees.

FY26 Accomplishment

In FY 2026, ISBE provided a workstream platform for agency employees to document protocols, processes, and procedures for assigned projects, while reviewing and updating workstreams to support alignment and continuous improvement.

ISBE delivered both foundational and application trainings throughout the year. Foundational trainings provide essential overviews for new staff, while application trainings offer deeper, role-specific learning for management and designated staff.

Goal
3.5**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Professional Learning**

ISBE will model professional learning opportunities focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI).

**Internal Objectives****3.5.1**

By the end of FY 2025, based on continuing research, ISBE will expand its internal resources focused on DEI.

3.5.2

By the end of FY 2026, ISBE will expand DEI professional learning offerings.

FY26 Accomplishment

Equity spotlights are incorporated into monthly All Agency meetings. Staff book studies and podcasts are facilitated on a yearly basis. Monthly Lunch and Learns have featured diverse guests to honor monthly cultural celebrations such as Dr. Rachael Mahmood for Women's History Month, as well as deaf and hard of hearing colleagues to build awareness for their community during National Deaf History Month.

Diversity Equity, and Inclusion resources are updated and added to ISBE's [Equity Information and Resources webpage](#).