



Critical Data Needed: Estimating the District Impact of ESP Unemployment Benefits

Hello and Happy Friday!

Senate activity this week was relatively quiet, with much of the focus shifting to the continued negotiation of proposals ahead of next week's Senate committee deadline. Next week is the Senate's deadline for bills to be out of committee, and although deadline weeks can be chaotic at times, the proposed schedule does not look too dire. The lighter Senate schedule also created time for numerous meetings with House sponsors and proponents to better understand the intent behind their proposals, assess whether bills will move, and begin negotiating changes to proposals that raise concerns.

One such proposal would provide unemployment benefits for educational support personnel (ESPs) during school breaks. Even if this bill does not ultimately move this spring, it is essential that we collect district-level data now to show legislators the potential financial impact statewide. **Your participation in this effort is critical!**



Action Needed: Data Collection Request

HB 4416 (Evans; D-Chicago) and **SB 3286** (Villivalam; D-Chicago) are initiatives of organized labor and seek to provide for unemployment benefits for educational support personnel (ESPs) during school breaks of longer than one week. While this could include winter and spring breaks, the primary focus of the proposal is the summer break period. An opposition fact sheet can be found [here](#).

This legislation raises significant concerns for school management organizations across the state due to the potential financial impact on school districts. As discussions with bill sponsors continue, it has become clear that we need concrete data to demonstrate how costly this proposal could be for districts statewide. Some regional data has already been collected to illustrate the impact in areas represented by the bill sponsors, and now we need to expand that effort to gather information from as many districts as possible.

We are asking for your assistance in providing this critical data. This brief survey is being sent to both IASA and IASBO members. Please coordinate within your district and submit **one response per district**. Regional associations (ED-RED, LEND, SCOPE) are also collecting similar data. If your district has already submitted information through one of those organizations, there is no need to complete this survey again. This is a coordinated effort, and all data collected will be shared amongst our groups to support our collective advocacy efforts.

The **Google Form linked [here](#)** requests several pieces of employment and financial information that will allow us to estimate the fiscal impact of this proposal and communicate those costs to legislators in Springfield.

If you would like to estimate the potential cost for your district, you can use the following formula to calculate **one week of unemployment benefits**:

of ESPs × Average Gross Weekly Pay (per ESP) × 0.47

*Example: A district employs 10 paraprofessionals, and the average gross weekly pay for employees in this category is \$600. Calculation for one week of unemployment benefits:
 $10 \times \$600 \times 0.47 = \$2,820$. The district would incur an estimated \$2,820 in unemployment costs for paraprofessionals for each week of summer break.*

Please also note that the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB) is activating school board members on this issue, also. As a result, board members may reach out to you requesting similar information to support advocacy efforts.

Legislation to Support

[SB 3273](#) (Cunningham; D-Chicago) would remove barriers that school districts are currently experiencing to installing solar projects on school campuses. The bill includes provisions related to improving interconnection timeline response, ensuring no surprise fees are included in the project, requiring timely distribution of net metering credits, and standardizing interconnection fees. The bill is supported by IASA, IASBO and IASB, and a fact sheet on the proposal can be viewed [here](#). We anticipate the bill receiving a committee hearing next Thursday in the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee.

Please consider contacting your Senator to ask for their support!

[SB 2950](#) (Martwick; D-Chicago) would extend the option for a TRS participant to receive an accelerated pension benefit payment (often referred to as the “pension buy-out program”) from June 30, 2026 to June 30, 2028. This proposal is one component of the Governor’s [pension plan](#) that he released in February, and is scheduled to be heard in the Senate Pensions committee next week.

Bills of Concern

[HB 5417](#) (Mussman; D-Schaumburg) would place significant new restrictions on the request for proposal (RFP) process that National School Lunch Program (NSLP) schools were only recently able to begin using following the passage of the Better School Lunches Act in 2022. Proponents argue the bill is necessary to ensure fairness and transparency in the RFP process. School management organizations have raised concerns with several provisions in the bill, including requirements that:

- Districts use a standardized evaluation rubric developed by ISBE
- Districts conduct mandatory taste tests as part of the selection process
- Districts visit a school site of comparable size for any responsive bidder where the vendor is currently operating
- A certified public accountant review the financial components of a proposed contract
- Non-NSLP schools be subject to the same new requirements

We are actively engaged in productive conversations with the House sponsor and the proponents related to our opposition to the proposal.

[SB 2914](#) (Cappel; D-Crest Hill) is an initiative of the Illinois Education Association (IEA) and seeks to allow notices to remedy to be grieved, as well as requires them to be removed from personnel files after four years. We have engaged in productive conversations with the sponsor and the IEA this week, but remain opposed to the proposal as currently written. We expect the bill to be heard in committee this week, but also anticipate that it will be held before any further action takes place in order to provide time to generate an amendment that will hopefully remove our opposition.

 **Other Important Information**

The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) released its final draft of the ESSA Plan as part of its efforts to redesign the current accountability system. You can view the final proposal at this [link](#). The plan will be presented to the State Board at its upcoming meeting on March 11, and a final listening tour session is scheduled for March 16 from 4-6pm. The registration link is available on the page linked above for those interested in attending. The plan is scheduled to receive final approval at the April 14 board meeting.

As always, thank you for reading and for your continued partnership in supporting our advocacy efforts, including completing the survey on estimated unemployment costs!

Sincerely,

Emily Warnecke
Chief of Staff