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The Effect of Evidence-Based Funding on Student Performance

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Abstract

Historically, education funding policies in the United States have been responsible for aiding the disproportionate allocation of resources to public school districts. Illinois school districts in particular have struggled with providing their students with an adequate education. The Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) model was implemented with the intent to distribute funds based on need and ability to reach an adequacy target. This research analyzes how student test scores have changed since the inception of the EBF policy in Illinois. This data is analyzed in an ordinary least squares and interrupted time series model to show the impact and significance of this policy change. Ultimately, Illinois school districts have not seen much improvement in test scores since EBF was enacted, but there is still hope that over time school districts will see significant change as a result of this funding model.

Introduction

The issue of public-school funding has reached critical levels, particularly in Illinois, where numerous school districts in lower-income areas are being disproportionately funded compared to wealthier school districts. As a former college student in Chicago, Illinois, I was personally touched by this disparity as I witnessed the challenges faced by underfunded schools during community engagement and outreach events. This experience prompted me to dive deeper into the Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) model and its impact on education in Illinois.

Public Act 100-0465, also known as the Evidence-Based Funding for Student Success Act, was signed into law on August 17, 2017. This EBF model allocates more resources to Illinois' most under-resourced and underserved school districts. According to Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), this new funding strategy aims to ensure all schools have the resources they need to provide a quality education and positive environment for their students. The overall concept of this approach is to recognize the connection between equity, adequacy, and academic achievement.

The EBF model was implemented in Illinois with the goal being to ensure that by June 30, 2027, Illinois has a public education system that ensures maximum educational development amongst its students (Martin et al., 2022). This new funding model was implemented in all public-school districts in Illinois. Ensuring financial equity is crucial as it upholds the principle of providing equal education in the United States, and its absence would be a violation of this ideal.

In this paper, I study the impact of EBF on student performance using state administrative data obtained from the ISBE. To be specific, I estimate an ordinary least square (OLS) and an interrupted time series (ITS) regression model to investigate the impact of EBF on

students' Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test scores at the district level between the 2014-2015 and 2018-2019 school years. This study examines the impact of EBF implementation on PARCC proficiency for middle school students in Illinois school districts. The results indicate that EBF has a very small impact on PARCC proficiency in ELA and mathematics for grade 6 to 8 during the first two years following implementation. The lack of statistically significant positive effects of EBF on PARCC proficiency show that the EBF is not a short-term fix to funding discrepancies in Illinois school districts. Despite the minor effects observed, school districts and administrators have maintained an optimistic outlook that this approach will provide substantial results in the future. Educators and superintendents explain that improvements in test scores are rarely evident immediately and that the full potential of this funding model will require several years to materialize. The study also notes that the impact of EBF may vary depending on implementation methods and student characteristics. Nevertheless, the current effects of EBF on PARCC proficiency provide valuable insights for policymakers and educators when designing education programs and policies.

Background

Literature on EBF in Illinois

Schools' discretion over the allocation of funds can frequently affect the implementation of EBF models. The research by Jennifer Martin and her coauthors in 2022 primarily focuses on different funding structures in schools in the United States (Martin et al., 2022). They examine how school funding is disproportionately allocated and investigate how each school district decides to allocate EBF funding. Due to the timing of the implementation of the EBF model, with its initiation just before the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts invested in

Chromebooks and iPads, enabling students to access school materials remotely during school closures.

It is frequently reported that new and more innovative curriculums and corresponding books are also used with the extra state funding (Martin et al., 2022). Equally as important as the physical learning materials are the educators who are teaching the students that are using these materials. As a result, many school districts decide to allocate funds to go toward professional development for its teachers. Another priority for these school districts is to decrease class sizes and to provide more support for each student. In order to achieve this, many schools hired more teachers, counselors, social workers, and psychologists. This initiative aims to consider the mental, social, and emotional needs of each district's students.

Mark Skertich conducted a study in 2019 that provides insight into the influences on the Illinois EBF model (Skertich, 2019). Understanding what affects this funding model is essential to an analysis. Skertich concluded that the previous studies which emphasized prioritizing student needs in funding models have influenced Illinois' decision to adopt the EBF model. Government officials in Rhode Island, Ohio, and Arkansas made changes to their local school districts education funding model that guided the funding model used in Illinois. For example, Rhode Island placed an emphasis on the needs of each student while also prioritizing innovation and effectiveness which are both represented in Illinois' EBF model. The focus of supporting each students' needs is one of the biggest guiding factors to this funding model change.

During his research, Mark Skertich conducted surveys of several superintendents in Illinois to understand how EBF could be best utilized (Skertich, 2019). Specifically, Skertich asked these superintendents about their opinions on the initiatives that the funding should support, with the top responses being counselors, school psychologists, and social workers,

followed by intervention specialists, professional development, instructional coaches, and technology. It is crucial for districts to have a clear plan for how this funding will be used in order to ensure that it is used effectively. Many survey participants noted that having a plan in place gives districts the best chance of improving their students' academic performance. In addition to discussing how the EBF will be utilized, survey participants explained that benchmark assessments and progress monitoring would be the areas most affected by this change. Interestingly, only 21% of district superintendents believed that EBF would impact test score proficiency the most. As a result, it is important to take a holistic approach when assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of the EBF model, as there are multiple ways to measure success.

Since Illinois has implemented the EBF model in response to the Student Success Act, every school district is required to create a spending plan to be reported to the state government (Skertich, 2019). The spending plan must include how the EBF will be allocated and how money will be spent. The plan has three parts: explaining how student growth will be achieved, establishing a plan for evidence-based funding, and allocating EBF resources to support students in need. It is important to recognize that implementing a plan like this takes time and is not an immediate solution. Skertich stresses that it would take a minimum of 3-5 years to see significant progress. This is particularly relevant when considering the EBF model in Illinois, which was introduced in the 2017-2018 school year, just three years before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pandemic affected every school district and altered the way students learn and receive instruction, it is essential to take this impact into account when analyzing outcome variables.

In his research on EBF policy in Illinois, conducted in 2012, Gregory Murphy examined whether the implementation of this policy would lead to an improvement in academic achievement among Illinois public schools. Ultimately, the goal of his writing was to determine whether Illinois public schools would see an improvement in academic achievement under the EBF if implemented (Murphy, 2012). What makes this information unique is that it was published in August 2012, which is five years prior to the inception of the EBF model in Illinois. In his analysis, Murphy identifies a crucial problem with the education system: the disproportionate allocation of education funds. This issue, he argues, is largely due to the reliance on property taxes as a primary source of funding for education systems. This reliance results in discrimination based on economic status, not just in Illinois, but across all states.

To address this problem, the EBF model was introduced to shift the major source of funds from local property taxes to state funding. This shift aims to ensure that even the most disadvantaged communities can provide adequate education to their students. By providing more equal access to funding, the EBF model seeks to level the playing field and reduce the disparities in educational outcomes that result from differences in economic status.

Moreover, the EBF model incorporates a range of factors to determine the funding requirements of each district. This includes an assessment of student needs, district demographics, and local wealth measures. The model ensures that funding is directed towards districts with the greatest need, rather than just those with the highest property values. By prioritizing the needs of students and districts, the EBF model creates a more fair and equitable education system for all students, regardless of their economic background.

Literature on EBF in Other States

In Appendix Table A1, I provide information on studies discussing different EBF models in Illinois, Wyoming, and Ohio for comparison. Although this project focuses on Illinois, it is important to make note that there are other states that also support the EBF model for education. In the paper written by Jennifer Martin and her coauthors, it is explained that before the EBF model Illinois had one of the most rigid and inadequate funding models in the country (Martin et al., 2022). However, after the new funding model was implemented, schools are able to provide more resources and better education for its students.

Allan Odden and his coauthors explain how Wyoming allocates funding to ensure that an adequate education is provided to students (Odden et al., 2005). The Wyoming Recalibration recommendations include investing in appropriate class sizes, specialist teachers, tutors, computers and equipment, professional development, and more. However, before Wyoming school officials could determine where the money would go, they needed to define what a proper or adequate education looks like. This is what guided their decision making moving forward because it is the focal point of the policy change.

Very similar to Wyoming, the state of Ohio has seen massive changes to its education funding due to a court battle known as the DeRolph litigation (Pittner et al., 2010). This court case challenged the previous funding model that was deemed unconstitutional. The focus of Ohio's transition to the EBF model is to build a connection between educational need and school funding. This source also outlines the uses of the additional funding school districts receive. After implementing this funding model, Ohio school districts argue that the EBF model did leave schools better off than before due to improvement of student test scores and the increase in resources provided to schools.

Illinois EBF Policy Description

The new funding model consists of several components. First, an adequacy target is established, which represents the amount of funding required to provide a high-quality education to students across all districts (ISBE). This adequacy target is calculated by factoring in various education costs such as core investments, per-student investments subject to comparable wage index, and additional investments. The initial adequacy target considers all these factors. The final adequacy target is then adjusted by a regionalization factor that accounts for differences in salaries across regions. Second, the local capacity target refers to the funds that the district can provide in order to attain the adequacy target. After taking these two portions of the formula into account, stage three consists of the government distributing additional state funds to assist districts with meeting their adequacy targets (ISBE). The percentage of adequacy attained determines the state's contribution. A lower percentage will require more state assistance, while a higher one requires less state assistance. According to the ISBE, this funding model expects districts with lower adequacy percentages to receive greater state assistance, eventually progressing towards the adequacy target. The ISBE has anticipated that Illinois will undergo a gradual and sustained transformation over the ten years following the introduction of the EBF in 2017, offering a long-term resolution to this disparity.

Research Question and Hypothesis

In recent years, the EBF model has gained popularity as an approach to distributing education funds. This model aims to allocate funds more equitably to schools based on evidence-based factors such as student population, teacher salaries, and academic performance. The impact of the EBF model on student achievement has been a subject of significant research and

debate. However, very few studies investigate this topic, and they document mixed descriptive evidence on the relationship between the EBF and student outcomes. In this paper, I contribute to the literature by exploring the impact of the EBF on student achievement in the context of Illinois. To fully comprehend the relationship, I first present descriptive trends of student academic performance over time, and then conduct rigorous estimations using OLS and ITS regression models to identify the effectiveness of the policy. My primary research question in this paper is:

What is the impact of the EBF model on student performance?

Hypothesis:

The EBF model not only provides schools with new and innovative curriculums and learning materials, but also allows for investment in the professional development of educators, reduction of class sizes, and hiring of additional support staff to address the diverse needs of students. The goal of EBF is to provide a more targeted and efficient use of resources, ultimately leading to better academic outcomes for all students. Therefore, my main hypothesis is:

The EBF model will increase student achievement in Illinois public school districts.

Data and Descriptive Statistics

Data Description

To study the impact of the EBF on student academic performance, I use administrative K-12 education system records in the state of Illinois from the 2014-2015 through 2018-2019 school years. To be specific, I obtain student performance data on PARCC at the district-level from the Illinois Report Card that are available from the ISBE.[1] The Illinois Report Card

[1] On the ISBE website, the Illinois Report Card is provided for each school year. The yearly report assesses the progress of the state, schools, and districts in achieving their objectives. The report card presents various metrics such as enrollment rates, chronic absentee rates, student-to-staff ratios, and expenses, among others.

provides a proficiency level on PARCC rates for grade 3 through 8 for each school and district every school year. This state assessment is the measure for Illinois students enrolled in a public school district and holds schools accountable. The assessment looks specifically at English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. See Appendix B for a detailed discussion of the PARCC data in this paper. Throughout my research, I will focus on PARCC scores from grade 6 to 8 as the outcome variable to determine if they show improvement over time after the implementation of the EBF model. Since the EBF was implemented in the 2017-2018 school year in the state of Illinois, the data covers a time frame that includes three years prior, and two years post the implementation of the EBF.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays an overview of the PARCC outcomes from 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 school years for grade 6 to 8, providing average proficiency rates for both ELA and math at the district level. On average, the PARCC proficiency rates are higher for ELA than math. In addition, the rates are relatively higher for grades 7 and 8 compared to grade 6.

Table 1: Summary Statistics for PARCC Proficiency Rates

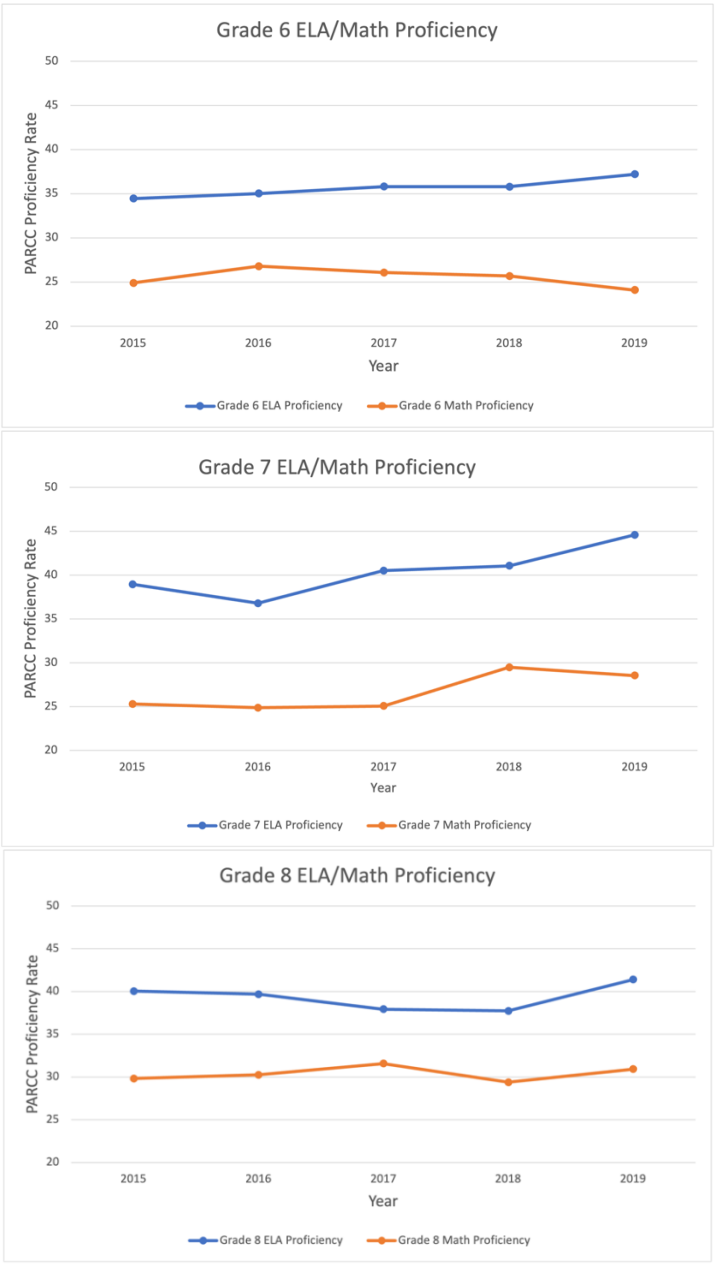
	Mean (%)	S.D. (%)
Grade 6 ELA	33.83	18.42
Grade 6 Math	23.89	16.56
Grade 7 ELA	38.42	19.83
Grade 7 Math	26.10	16.97
Grade 8 ELA	37.65	19.37
Grade 8 Math	28.44	18.12

Notes: Standard deviations are displayed in parentheses. Each observation represents the mean proficiency rate based on grade and subject at the district level.

I show the PARCC proficiency rates of grade 6 to 8 in ELA and math subjects over time in Figure 1. It should be emphasized that the 2017-2018 school year marks the start of the EBF implementation. The purpose of these graphs is to demonstrate the trend of PARCC data before

and after the implementation of the EBF. Overall, the trend is relatively flat before the EBF implementation, and the proficiency rates start to increase gradually during post-policy periods.

Figure 1: PARCC Proficiency Outcomes by Grades and Subjects, 2014-2015 to 2018-2019 School Years



Notes: Each point displays the proficiency rates for PARCC test scores each year. Each year represents the spring of a corresponding school year. EBF implementation occurred in year 2018. The author collects the data from the Illinois Report Card library and then calculate the average proficiency rate by grade and by subjects at the district level.

Methods

To explore the impact of the EBF on student performance, I estimate two separate regression models: Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and Interrupted Time Series (ITS). An OLS model compares the differences in the student outcomes before and after the implementation of the EBF. To be specific, I estimate the following equation:

$$(1) Y_{dt} = \beta_1 EBF_t + \beta_2 \alpha_d + e_{dt}$$

where Y_{dt} denotes the outcome variable which is the proficiency level for each grade from grade 6 to 8 in district (*d*) and year (*t*). EBF_t is a binary indicator that equals to 1 if the EBF is implemented in school year *t* and 0 otherwise. α_d denotes district fixed effects which capture time-invariant heterogeneities across school districts. The effect of the EBF is captured by β_1.

To improve upon the identification of EBF impacts, I use an ITS model. An ITS design entails collecting data consistently before and after an interruption. In this case, the interruption is the EBF. The ITS model takes the following form:

$$(2) Y_{dt} = \beta_1 Year_t + \beta_2 EBF_t + \beta_3 Year\_Since\_EBF_t + \beta_4 \alpha_d + e_{dt}$$

where the variable $Year_t$ represents the number of years passed since the start of the observational period, which spans five school years in total, beginning in the 2014-2015 school year and ending in the 2018-2019 school year. $Year\_Since\_EBF_t$ denotes the number of years that have elapsed since EBF was implemented in the 2017-2018 school year. β_1 nets out time-varying differences in an outcome that are measured in the pre-EBF period. β_2 and β_3 capture the EBF effect in a level shift and slope change, respectively. I measure the total EBF effect by the 2018-2019 school year, the second and final operational year in the analytical period, as:

$$\beta_2 + 2 \times \beta_3$$

Main Results

OLS Regression Model

Table 2 presents the estimated results derived from the equation (1). This model aims to assess the difference in outcomes before and after the implementation of EBF. The results indicate that the implementation of EBF is correlated with an improved proficiency level of students in PARCC exams for grade 7 mathematics, with the p-values indicating statistical significance, as marked by the asterisks in the table. However, the EBF is negatively correlated with the PARCC proficiency levels in grade 6 and 8. Overall, compared to the summary statistics that I present in Table 1, these estimated coefficients are very small in magnitude.

Table 2: Results Based on the OLS Model

	PARCC Proficiency (%)	Standard Err. (%)
Grade 6 ELA	-2.20***	0.37
Grade 6 Math	-3.61***	0.28
Grade 7 ELA	-0.51	0.44
Grade 7 Math	1.79***	0.30
Grade 8 ELA	-2.66***	0.42
Grade 8 Math	-3.70***	0.32

Notes: Standard errors are shown in parentheses. *** p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.10

ITS Regression Model

Table 3 displays the estimation obtained through equation (2). This model presents the average impact of the EBF on the PARCC proficiency based on the subject and grade level. The results on the total effect indicate that there is a positive effect of EBF implementation in grade 7 mathematics and grade 8 ELA. The statistical significance of these positive effects is presented by the p-values which are marked by asterisks in the table. These findings suggest that the implementation of EBF has had a beneficial impact on PARCC proficiency in these subject areas and grade levels. However, the EBF has negatively affected the PARCC proficiency level in other grades and subjects. Overall, this data is consistent with the results that I present in Table 2; the estimated ITS coefficients are very small in magnitude.

Table 3: Results Based on the ITS Model

	Grade 6 ELA	Grade 6 Math	Grade 7 ELA	Grade 7 Math	Grade 8 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Year	0.80***	0.66***	0.90***	-0.013	-1.05***	0.88***
	(0.29)	(0.21)	(0.29)	(0.21)	(0.29)	(0.23)
EBF	3.93***	1.07**	6.73***	5.93***	4.23***	1.85***
	(0.59)	(0.44)	(0.60)	(0.47)	(0.59)	(0.49)
Year_EBF	-3.58***	-2.81***	-4.17***	-1.65***	-1.31***	-3.47***
	(0.36)	(0.24)	(0.38)	(0.27)	(0.38)	(0.29)
Total Effect	-3.23	-4.55	-1.61	2.63	1.61	-5.09
# of obs	5,164	5,166	5,146	5,143	5,132	5,132

Notes: Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Total effect is calculated with the formula $EBF + 2 \times Year\_EBF$. *** p<0.01 ** p<0.05 * p<0.10

Discussion

The results from Tables 2 and 3 provide valuable insights into the impact of EBF implementation on PARCC proficiency for middle school students. Table 2 demonstrates a minimal correlation between EBF implementation and the proficiency of students in grade 7 mathematics. Table 3 documents similar findings that the EBF has a small positive impact on PARCC proficiency in both grade 7 mathematics and grade 8 ELA. However, the EBF results in negative effects on the proficiency in other grades or subjects as I observe in Tables 2 and 3. It is worth noting that the estimated coefficients and policy effects are very small in magnitude. My analysis focuses on the impact of the EBF policy in a very short period (i.e., two years after the policy implementation), and the policy effects may be larger and positive overall in a long run. In addition, it is important to note that the impact of EBF may vary depending on various factors, such as implementation methods and student characteristics. However, the lack of statistically significant positive effects of EBF on PARCC proficiency in these subject areas and grade levels can still provide valuable insights for policymakers and educators to consider when designing education programs and policies for students.

Despite efforts to improve PARCC proficiency rates, significant increases have been limited. Martin and her coauthors suggest that one of the reasons is a lack of investment in strategies to ensure that teaching demographics reflect student demographics (Martin et al., 2022). This includes allocating more funding towards ELA resources in districts with a high population of students with English as a second language. Skertich also emphasizes the importance of meeting students' basic at home needs, such as safety and nurturing, as a lack of these factors can negatively impact academic achievement (Skertich, 2019). In addition, a lack of funding allocated to professional development and teacher shortages in Illinois can also hinder

progress in improving PARCC proficiency rates. Without proper professional development opportunities for teachers and an adequate supply of teachers, it becomes challenging to utilize new educational tools and resources effectively. Ultimately, these factors have all contributed to the limited progress made in increasing PARCC proficiency rates.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the issue of public-school funding in Illinois has reached critical levels, with numerous school districts in lower-income areas being disproportionately underfunded compared to wealthier districts. This disparity has a significant impact on the academic performance of students in these underfunded schools. The EBF model has been implemented as a tool to address this issue, and its impact on education in Illinois has been studied. The findings above show that EBF has shown little to null effects regarding improving the academic performance of students in grades 6 to 8. The lack of statistically significant positive effects of EBF on PARCC proficiency show that the EBF is not a short-term fix to funding discrepancies in Illinois school districts. Instead, EBF is an approach takes time, money, and strategy to see significant positive change. It is essential to recognize that the impact of EBF may vary depending on various factors, such as implementation methods and student characteristics. Nonetheless, the findings suggest that EBF has the potential to address the issue of underfunding in lower-income areas and improve the academic outcomes of students in these schools.

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Appendix A

Table A1: The EBF Policy in Different States

Article	Authors	State of Focus	EBF Policy Description	Finding
Evidence Based Funding in Illinois A Discussion of Equity in Urban Education	Martin et al. (2022)	Illinois	Jennifer Martin and her coauthors look at how Illinois allocated EBF money to ensure that the teacher demographics mirrored the student demographics, along with other initiatives such as better technology and resources.	Martin et al. discuss how Illinois was in desperate need of a funding shift in order to improve educational environments in schools. They explain that Illinois has seen drastic funding gaps because the main source of funding for districts come from property taxes. They also stress the importance of not only having enough teachers, but also having teachers that are quality advocates for students. They insist that it is important to invest in the professional development of teachers.
An Evidence-based Approach to Recalibrating Wyoming's Block Grant School Funding Formula	Odden et al. (2005)	Wyoming	Wyoming school districts decided it was important to allocate EBF to teacher salaries.	Wyoming began utilizing the EBF model in order to meet "high learning goals" and provide a proper education for students. This source discusses this transition. This paper provides a summary of how the funding should be allocated to achieve the intended goals. Wyoming school districts invested in teachers to increase the quality of education students receive and to ensure that class sizes are appropriate for an adequate learning environment.
School Funding in Ohio: From "DeRolph" to the Evidence-Based Funding Model (EBM) and Beyond	Pittner et al. (2010)	Ohio	Ohio school districts found it necessary to allocate EBF funds toward teacher salaries and hiring more special needs teachers,	Ohio implemented the EBF model after the Ohio Supreme Court decided that the previous foundation-based funding system was unconstitutional. This paper explains why EBF was implemented, the changes that were made, and why the

			supplemental teachers, etc. EBF funds also went to administrative support, technology advances, and special education programs.	EBF model has yet to provide a major impact on schools. According to Pittner and his coauthors, EBF was intended to combat constitutional deficiencies found by Ohio courts. Although Ohio has not seen a major impact from the EBF model, it is argued that it still moves Ohio school districts toward the goal of providing a thorough and efficient education to Ohio students.

Appendix B: PARCC in Illinois

Throughout my research and data collection I gather PARCC test scores to determine if they show improvement over time after the implementation of the EBF model. PARCC assessments are a standardized testing system that evaluates students' proficiency in ELA and Mathematics (ISBE). The assessments are based on the new Illinois Learning Standards, which incorporate the Common Core (ISBE). Students in grade 3 to 8 are required to take these tests. PARCC assessments are designed to measure students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills in these two subjects. These tests provide a comprehensive understanding of how well students are progressing in their education and help identify areas where they may need additional support. By providing a standardized way of evaluating students' progress, PARCC assessments can help ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education that prepares them for success in college and career.

The first operational administration of PARCC assessments took place in 2014 (ISBE). During the 2014-2015 school year, the assessments were administered to students in eleven states and the District of Columbia (ISBE). The tests are designed to provide valuable data that can be used to inform classroom instruction, student interventions, and professional development. PARCC assessments are carefully constructed to measure students' proficiency in ELA and Mathematics, and they are intended to be an accurate reflection of students' knowledge and skills in these subjects. By providing educators with detailed information about their students' performance, PARCC assessments can help teachers tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. Additionally, the data collected from these assessments can be used to identify areas where students may need additional support or intervention, helping to ensure that all students are given the tools they need to succeed academically.

When assessing students' academic performance, it is important to have a standardized system that provides clear and consistent information. In the case of PARCC assessments, this system is based on five performance levels. These levels provide a straightforward way of reporting students' results and understanding their proficiency. The highest level is Level 5, which indicates that the student has exceeded expectations (ISBE). Level 4 indicates that the student has met expectations, while Level 3 suggests that the student has approached expectations. Level 2 means that the student has partially met expectations, while the lowest level, Level 1, indicates that the student has not yet met expectations. These performance levels provide a clear and concise way of understanding how well students are performing in the areas of ELA and mathematics, and they help educators identify areas where students may need additional support or intervention. By using these performance levels, educators can ensure that all students are receiving a high-quality education that prepares them for success both in and out of the classroom.