Case Study

November 2026

Brimfield, IL School District Improves Student and Building Funding Through Illinois Shines, Making History Along the Way



Illinois Shines
Building Our Solar Future

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Energy Solutions
Program Administrator

Summary

Brimfield, Illinois sits just 18 miles from Peoria, and is home to about 800 residents. Like other small towns, Brimfield must be creative with its resources. Looking to address facilities needs without making difficult budget cuts or seeking a tax increase, Brimfield Community Unit School District #309 worked with experienced Illinois Shines Approved Vendors ("AVs")[1] to develop a cost-cutting and income earning solution: a solar project through the Illinois Shines Public Schools category.[2] This study showcases how a rural school district worked with community-minded solar developers to adopt affordable clean energy. The school district achieved bill savings, budget relief for its schools and community, and engaged local skilled laborers, all while making history as the state's first community solar project hosted on school grounds.

Facing the Challenge

Brimfield has about 600 pre-K through 12th grade students who pass through its grade school and high school buildings. These young minds are supported by 80 staff members and the district's commitment to "doing what is best for kids!" However, funding shortfalls were straining the district's budget. Brimfield was struggling to address aging facility maintenance, safety needs, and desired resources to enhance student achievement.

Peoria County—where Brimfield is located—had recently found budgetary relief through Illinois Shines, a state-administered solar incentive program overseen by the Illinois Power Agency that provides incentives for the development of qualified solar projects. Peoria County installed Illinois Shines community solar projects that were delivering bill savings to residents and other local benefits. Inspired by these results, the County Board Chair suggested to Brimfield's superintendent that the high school host a community solar project to reduce costs and potentially generate revenue. The school owns about 40 acres, but only half were in use at the time.

Project Details

Project Name:
Jubilee Solar

Energization:
October, 2025

System Size:
3 MW

Subscriber Mix:
40% public schools,
60% residential and business

Expected yearly energy production:
3,800 MWh

First Year Subscriber Energy Savings:
$24,000 in savings plus
$15,000 in lease revenue

Illinois Shines Project Category:
Public Schools

Project type:
Community Solar

1 Approved Vendors are entities approved by the Program Administrator (as an agent of the Illinois Power Agency), to submit project applications to the Illinois Shines Program. For this project, one AV developed the project, after which ownership and management was transferred to a second AV.

2 Public Schools is one of Illinois Shines' six project categories. Information about each of the categories can be found at illinoisshines.com/exploring-solar.

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With the County's support, Brimfield School District initially connected with an AV experienced in developing solar projects to consider hosting a Public Schools project on the high school's unused land. The pair considered different avenues for participation in Illinois Shines, ultimately landing on applying for the Public Schools category—one of the Program's six project categories. The Public Schools category specifically supports distributed generation and community solar projects located on public schools' land.[3] The Public Schools category had available capacity at the time, meaning it was accepting project applications for available incentive funding. Having agreed on the path forward, the team set out to bring the project to life.

Developing a Solution

Using School Assets to Save Costs and Generate Income

With multiple community and school district stakeholders involved, the project required extensive education, collaboration, and consensus-building to navigate decisions around project ownership, system size, location, and whether to develop the project independently or partner with a solar developer. Brimfield benefited from the expertise of two AVs throughout the development of the project. The first AV had developed and evaluated many school projects, and could present options for community discussions. Working together, the first AV and the district arrived at a novel but exciting solution: to host a community solar project on a portion of the school's unused grounds, the first such project in Illinois.

A community solar project is a shared solar energy system that generates electricity for multiple subscribers, such as residents, businesses, schools, or local governments. Subscribers receive credits on their utility bills for their share of the power produced. Under the proposed arrangement, development, ownership, and management would be handled by a secondary Illinois Shines AV. This way, the school would benefit from the first AV's project planning and community engagement skills, while leaning on a second AV for continued support throughout the lifetime of the project. Following the project's completion, the school would subscribe to the project as an "anchor tenant,"[4] and immediately begin saving on its energy costs. Further, by hosting the project, the school would also earn an annual lease payment from the developers, realizing both electric bill savings and income over a 20-year lease. In addition, the project increased property tax revenue for local taxing bodies, including the school district, providing another important source of income.

Project Approval and Community Outreach

Located in a farming community and with an agricultural education program in schools, the district knew that some local residents might not immediately be in support of utilizing school land for non-agricultural purposes but reasoned that finding resources to support students was most important. As its current superintendent Chad Jones shared, "When you're facing deficit spending, there are a couple of solutions – borrow money or increase taxes, neither of which is popular. We wanted to look at cutting expenses and potentially even increasing income, and that meant all options were on the table."

3 A public school project is defined as a distributed generation up to and including 5 MW AC in size or a community solar project up to and including 10 MW AC that is located on public school land. Public schools include public schools as defined under Section 1-3 of the Illinois School Code and includes public institutions of higher education, as defined in the Board of Higher Education Act.

4 For Illinois Shines projects participating in the Public Schools category, the public school or school district that owns the land where the project is sited must be an anchor subscriber to the community solar project, commonly referred to as "anchor tenant". As such, the public school or school district must subscribe to a minimum of 10% of the project's capacity, without exceeding 40% of the project's capacity.

The community had questions about the project's location, maintenance, safety, and the village lacked an ordinance to support the project and issue a permit. Working together through multiple meetings and the assistance of local attorneys, the developers addressed the questions and concerns of the community, school board and village leadership, and garnered support to move forward. The necessary ordinance was then adopted, and a permit was granted in 2022. Additionally, to secure approval from Ameren to connect the project to the electrical grid and make the project viable, the developer funded new utility lines and poles throughout Brimfield, covering those infrastructure costs through a related sister project.



> ***"Having a lot of very good local laborers and members, along with Illinois Shines workforce requirements sets us up for success. Our pivot to renewable energy work including solar and wind has made up for work lost due to decommissioned coal power plants, providing opportunities for our students and apprentices. We're changing a lot of people's lives through this program."***
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> *– Dane Simpson, Director Great Plains LECET*

Community Benefit

In addition to the school district's financial gains, the project would provide other valuable community benefits. Local residents, too, could subscribe to the project to earn bill credits and save on energy costs. In addition to incentives available through the Illinois Shines program, the developer helped the project, now known as Jubilee Solar, secure a Low-Income Communities Bonus Credit, a federal tax credit that is earned in exchange for meeting its requirement that at least 50% of the system's usage be allocated to low- and moderate-income (LMI) subscribers. The project allowed area subscribers to save up to 20% on their energy bills.

The project's construction also provided valuable economic opportunities for local skilled laborers. To support construction, the Great Plains Laborers Local 165, which is a part of the Laborers' International Union of America (LIUNA), established a project labor agreement specifically for Jubilee Solar with the project's engineering, procurement and construction contractor to employ some of its local laborers. With a deep, skilled workforce that included Equity Eligible Persons who helped meet Illinois Shines' workforce requirements, Laborers Local 165 was able to help staff the project. Between January and October 2025, the union supplied six to twelve Laborers on the project and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) staffed the project with Electricians who wired and secured panels as well as installed the inverters. Laborers received prevailing wages, a minimum compensation level set by the Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) by county for construction activities related to public works, and applicable to most Illinois Shines projects. In October 2025, following rapid development, Jubilee Solar was energized into service.

> ***We can't overstate the importance of educated, local supporters. The Superintendent and the Board President carried the necessary momentum, while the members of the district's Buildings and Ground Committee provided local, trusted knowledge to address frequently asked questions and concerns. The quantity and quality of local knowledge and support not only made the project possible, but made it possible to move quickly – from lease signing to energization in under four years."***
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> *-Senior Project Development Manager, Jubilee Schools Approved Vendor*

Results

Since being energized, Jubilee Solar has paid immediate benefits to Brimfield Community School District and its students. Through its subscription to the project as an anchor tenant, the district is saving $2,000 a month on its energy costs. In addition, through its 20-year lease, the district will earn approximately $15,000 a year. In year two of its current Five-Year Strategic Plan, the district is putting that money to use, addressing facilities improvements, safety needs, operating expenses, and investments in students and staff.

Community members including some low- to middle-income residents in and around Brimfield are saving on their energy costs through subscriptions. Another major subscriber, Washington Community High School District, located east of Peoria, is seeing savings benefits, too. The use of local skilled laborers provided workforce opportunity and economic productivity to the community, supporting the shift to clean, renewable energy throughout the region. Each of these stakeholders share in the project's benefits and its history-making role. Superintendent Jones understands the use of farmland had some detractors, but the school continued to maintain other acreage available for its agricultural program, and the project's site can be returned to agricultural service when the lease concludes. Superintendents know that when budgets are tight, districts must reduce expenses or find additional revenue, and Jubilee Solar allowed them to do both.



Key Lessons Learned

1. Let Priorities Drive Your Project. Brimfield School District faced budget challenges and was projecting further future shortfalls. But its building and safety needs weren't going away, and its pledge to do what's right for students remained paramount. With growing needs and a desire to avoid critical education cuts or request a tax increase, the district was open to innovation. Though many other public schools have "gone solar" through Illinois Shines, Brimfield's history-making, school-sited community solar installation reflects its commitment to its students and community. That adherence to its priorities has delivered great financial benefit to the district and others. Communities and school districts interested in exploring solar for their schools can access Illinois Shines resources and support through the program website's Solar for Schools page.

2. Leverage Experience to Ensure Success. Though it was the first community solar project sited at a public school in Illinois, Jubilee Solar was not the first community solar project in Peoria County. Community-minded solar developers had brought other projects and customer savings to the county, and that commitment to working locally, establishing trust, and navigating local challenges was essential for project success. Because of their prior successful work with county officials, the solar developers were given the opportunity to consider and propose a solution for Brimfield Community School District. To educate the community, developers attended town halls, worked closely and creatively with school administrators and village leaders, and even leveraged another of its projects to creatively maximize Jubilee Solar's value and viability. As a result, schools and residents from all across Peoria County are saving money and leveraging clean, renewable energy.

3. Local Experts and Workforce Can Multiply Benefits. Jubilee Solar took vision and commitment, from county leadership, school administrators, community groups, and the project's dedicated solar developers. It also took the committed efforts of a local attorney to help align stakeholders, the work of skilled laborers to quickly deploy their experience to the project team, and the school's building and grounds crew to help consult on the siting. With more than 100,000 energized projects in the state and many more in the pipeline, each Illinois Shines project is uniquely shaped by local talents and experts. Jubilee Solar may be the first community solar project sited on public school grounds in Illinois, but it almost certainly won't be the last.



Interested in Bringing Solar To Your School?

Is your school considering going solar? The Illinois Shines program has incentives for K-12 public schools and public institutions of higher education. Read more at the Solar for Schools page at www.IllinoisShines.com.