

# Indiana School Boards Association 2024 Legislative Priorities

## 1. Teacher Retention and Student Support Services Grant Program

ISBA supports the creation of a new **Teacher Retention & Student Support Services Grant Program** to address ongoing challenges faced with teacher retention and shortages in critical student support services areas. Dedicated funding for trained health and support service professionals would ease the burden of classroom teachers. The funding will support staff trained and certified in needed areas of student care. This support will lead to higher teacher retention and better student academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. Comprehensive mental and behavioral health services in schools improve students' ability to learn.

According to a recent report of the American School Counselors Association, Indiana has the highest student to academic counselor ratio of 694:1. The preferred ratio is 250:1. More counselors are needed to help guide high school graduation pathways, including work-based learning, apprenticeship, and internship opportunities for students in the workplace. (Source: <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/b9d453e7-7c45-4ef7-bf90-16f1f3cbab94/Ratios-21-22-Alpha.pdf>)

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist per every 500 students. The current ratio in Indiana is 1 to 1,502, approximately 3 times the recommended ratio. <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/state-shortages-data-dashboard>

In a joint statement, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental and behavioral health in October of 2021. This declaration remains in effect and includes several recommendations, including: "Increase implementation and sustainable funding of effective models of school-based mental health care, including clinical strategies and models for payment." (Source: [AAP Declaration](#)). One in five students suffers from a mental health disorder and roughly 80% of children and youth who are in need of mental health services do not receive them. Furthermore, 70–80% of students who do receive mental health services receive them in school.

This grant proposal was developed and supported during the 2023 budget session of the state legislature by ISBA, IASBO, IAPSS, the Indiana School Counselors Association, and the Indiana Association of School Psychologists. The following unfunded state grant programs addressing student support services would be streamlined into this new grant program: **School Intervention and Career Counseling Development Program and Fund (IC 20-20-17); Elementary School Counselors, Social Workers, and School Psychologists Program and Fund (IC 20-20-18); and Grants for Mental Health Counselor Licenses for School Counselors (IC 20-20-18.5)**. While the essence of the three grant programs to be consolidated under this proposal address real needs of students and staffing needs of school corporations, these grant programs have either never, or not recently, been funded by the state.

This program would be administered by the Indiana Department of Education with allowable uses of the grant funds to include:

- Teacher mentor stipends of \$1,500 for support of first- and second-year teachers
- Teacher and support services retention bonuses/stipends (after 3, 5, and 10 years of service when returning to the school in fall semester of next school year)
- Flexibility to use funds for Teacher Advancement Programs or teacher residency programs to retain highly qualified teachers with higher pay and scheduling flexibility to coach other teachers during the school day
- Hiring additional support service professionals through use of funds for salary (career coaches, school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, therapists, nurses)
- Recruitment grants (housing allowance, moving stipend, 1-time hiring bonus, grow-your-own programs, etc.)

## **2. TIF Taxing Matters**

ISBA supports the suitable and reasonable use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) as a fiscal policy tool for community economic development with appropriate guidelines for redevelopment commissions. It is important that the original assessment, whether the property is taxable or not, is used for the calculation of the AV base for a TIF area to ensure all appropriate taxes flow to the respective taxing entities, including schools. If a proposed TIF property is not taxable at the time of the allocation area being established, ISBA proposes that the taxes that would have been paid as pre-developed land be included in the base AV to determine property tax levy distributions to local units of government.

## **3. Referendum Issues**

### **A. Clarifying Referendum Tax Rate Information**

HEA 1271 (Public Law 38-2021) revised the local public question for Controlled Projects, Operations, and school safety referenda of school corporations to include the “estimated average percentage of property tax increase” on residential and business property. This new language replaced the prior long-standing language that provided the proposed property tax rate increase per \$100 assessed valuation to the property taxpayer. This new language is ambiguous and could misinform a taxpayer who would pay significantly less, or more, than the average percentage of property tax increase the school corporation will receive. ISBA supports changing the ballot language to include the property tax to be paid annually by voters/residents for an average value (median) residence in that community and what the property tax paid annually would be for a business property per \$100,000 of net assessed value.

### **B. Adding Capital Referendum (Controlled Project) Net Tax Rate Ballot Language**

ISBA proposes allowing school corporations to adjust the referendum ballot question to include a net estimated average percentage of property tax increase that the school corporation will receive after deducting any retirement of debt scheduled during the lifespan of an approved referendum. Inclusion of this information on the ballot will provide a more accurate depiction of the long-term cost impact of the proposed referendum on taxpayers/voters.

#### **4. Education Regulatory Relief Measures**

##### **A. Repeal Ineffective Public Hearing Requirements**

###### **i. Mandatory Hearing on Proposed Superintendent**

The mandatory public hearing on the proposed contract of a (new) superintendent creates a difficult situation for the candidate in terms of the timing of disclosure to their current board and corporation. It makes the process and timing of moving forward with a search for the board losing a superintendent much more difficult if not impossible depending on the time of the year a search is completed. It is also an issue of transparency since it unnecessarily delays an announcement of a new superintendent and often leads to speculation and questions on the part of the community. It delays the process of transitioning to new leadership which could be a hindrance for the board, incoming superintendent, and overall operation of the school corporation.

###### **ii. Mandatory Hearing on CBA**

ISBA supports the repeal of the mandatory public hearing before the start of bargaining (IC 20-29-6-1). The public is not a party to the collective bargaining agreement and is not familiar with the bargaining process and/or the subjects of bargaining. Most school boards and superintendents advise that patrons rarely attend or testify at this hearing. The public has the opportunity to give input on the tentative agreement reached by the school board and the teachers' association before the board votes on the agreement. Additionally, the public has access to the bargained agreement since current law requires the agreement to be posted on the school corporation's website.

##### **B. School Improvement Plans (IC 20-31-5) – REPEAL**

The annual school improvement plan has become obsolete and should be repealed to focus on student achievement progress illustrated in the new Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed Data Dashboard system. The improvement plans take a considerable amount of time and effort on behalf of the school leadership team and must follow an extensive list of components prescribed by IDOE. Schools do not receive feedback or approval from IDOE after submission. Time invested at the school building level for this perfunctory compliance reporting could be used for more meaningful school improvement activities within schools.

##### **C. Primetime Program (IC 20-43-9) – REPEAL**

While once a very meaningful program with significant funds tied to it, the Primetime Program is no longer funded or included in the state's tuition support formula and, thus, school corporations do not receive monies for this purpose (class size reduction). School corporations are accountable to the stakeholders within their communities regarding desirable class-size ratios.

##### **D. Streamlined Reporting for School Corporations**

House Enrolled Act 1638 (Public Law 250-2023) requires the Indiana Department of Education to report to the legislature recommendations for reducing the amount of redundant data schools must report. ISBA will lend support to these recommendations generally speaking to ask the Indiana General Assembly to help streamline excessive data and compliance reporting required by state agencies.

**E. Delay in Hiring New Superintendent Post General Election**

ISBA believes that school boards should have restored authority to negotiate a contract to hire a new superintendent, without a temporary moratorium following the general election. It would be helpful and efficient for boards to have local control flexibility to move forward the superintendent contract and have their new person in place more easily before a spring semester if a mid-school year hire is necessary to fill a vacancy in the role.

**5. Various Education Matters**

**A. Curricular Materials**

ISBA seeks clarification on permissible fees that may be assessed to parents for the delivery of educational services and extracurricular activities for students. With the elimination of the textbook rental fee system and move to state-funded curricular materials reimbursement, some expenses such as consumable materials (lab fees, gym uniforms, workbooks possessed by students, musical instruments, etc.) and co-curricular fees (textbooks, exams/certifications, and college credit) have school boards concerned about significant funding shortfalls. ISBA calls for an explicit list of permissible fees that enable continued charges for these types of expenses.

**B. Open Door Law Pertaining to Committees**

Following the Public Access Counselor's recent advisory opinions on public notice requirements for committees created by superintendents or principals, the Open Door Law should be amended to clarify that committees not created by a board need not comply with these requirements.

**C. Stop Arm Violation Fine and Penalty Enforcement**

Enhanced efforts are needed to enforce school bus stop arm violation penalties and fines to better protect students in school bus zones. Legislation introduced in the 2021 and 2022 sessions proposed that a registered owner of a motor vehicle commits an infraction if the owner's vehicle is used to violate the school bus stop arm law. Passage of this legislation would lessen the burden of proof to identify the driver of the vehicle.

**D. Modify 1% Alternate Diploma Limit**

Indiana law limits the percentage of students with disabilities who receive an alternate diploma that count toward a high school graduation rate to one percent (1%) of students in a cohort. This limitation unfairly penalizes school corporations with small graduating classes. ISBA supports modifying this requirement to 1 percent or three students, whichever is greater.

## **2024 Indiana School Boards Association Legislative Foundational Statements**

The Indiana School Boards Association (ISBA) is dedicated to improving the quality of public education and school governance throughout the state of Indiana. ISBA recognizes the role of the General Assembly in enacting legislation that impacts public education and is committed to representing the interests of its member school corporations when addressing legislative initiatives. ISBA has adopted the following foundational statements to formalize its position as it advocates on behalf of Indiana school boards, public education, and students on present and future legislation.

### **Support Exceptional Learning Opportunities for Hoosier Children**

The ISBA supports programs and policies to provide exceptional learning opportunities for Hoosier children. Given that approximately 92 percent of all K-12 students attend a public school, the families of more than 1 million students have spoken and have made public schools the “schools of choice.” We believe that through local control, we have created a rich and diverse public education system that provides a multitude of learning environments, programs, and curricular offerings to students. Through these opportunities we prepare a new generation of students to be college and career ready, helping drive the economic growth and prosperity of the state.

### **Promote Equitable Funding of Public Schools**

The ISBA supports the funding of public schools that is annually adjusted to keep ahead of inflation and that improves Indiana’s national rankings on per pupil funding and teacher compensation. This allows local boards of education to support the ongoing improvement in the quality of public education and ensure adequate resources to address the learning needs of all children. ISBA supports the equitable funding of public schools, recognizing that schools may need additional funding to educate economically disadvantaged students and students with unique educational needs.

### **Empower School Board Authority**

The ISBA supports empowering local boards of education with the authority to govern the educational and financial matters, including health and safety measures, for students and employees of school corporations. In addition, the ISBA supports maintaining the authority to make changes to local reorganization plans, including consolidation and disannexation of school corporations, with school boards and the voters who reside within the particular school corporations affected.

### **Engage and Involve Families**

The ISBA believes that family involvement results in stronger schools and better student outcomes. School boards continually strive to create opportunities for parents and stakeholders to be heard, including through participation on local curriculum review and development committees. Parents/stakeholders should continue to have a process or opportunity for input through the classroom teacher, principal, superintendent, and finally the school board. Ultimately, the establishment of student achievement goals and curriculum review and approval rest with the school board, who are elected or appointed representatives of the school community.

### **Maintain Safe and Supportive Classrooms**

The ISBA believes that every child deserves a safe and secure learning environment. ISBA supports local control—with state support, broad policy, and appropriate funding—to implement comprehensive school safety plans informed by a threat assessment and developed in

collaboration with local law enforcement and public safety agencies. ISBA opposes funded or unfunded mandates for implementation of specific school safety equipment, devices, or technology. Policies and funding pertaining to school safety should be holistic and include addressing the social and emotional needs of students and staff, including resources for guidance counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and mental health therapists to support student and staff wellness.

### **Promote High-Quality Teachers and School Leaders**

The ISBA believes that effective educational achievement outcomes depend on a high-quality teacher and administrator workforce. We support legislation that respects and values the teaching profession vital to the success of public schools. We support state policies and laws that enable “teachers to teach” without burdensome regulation or policies that diminish or demean the profession. ISBA seeks support for teacher recruitment strategies that both address critical shortage areas and attract a pipeline of diverse teacher candidates into the classroom, such as promising “Grow Your Own” partnerships between schools and postsecondary institutions and state pre-service teacher scholarship programs to attract more minority teachers to better reflect Indiana’s student population. ISBA is a proponent of initiatives that improve the retention of excellent educators, including enhanced support for mentoring and leadership development.

### **Support Professional Development**

The ISBA supports professional development opportunities that provide dedicated time for training and mentoring that enhance and elevate the teaching profession. We support state funding for professional development and in-service programs. ISBA also supports enhanced teacher training on e-learning instruction strategies that reflect best practice and proven methodologies to engage students in a virtual environment.

### **Seek Rigorous and Consistent Financial and Academic Outcome Measures for All Schools**

ISBA believes that the best approach to tracking the academic progress and effectiveness of our schools is through public transparency and availability of multiple academic outcome measures. The metrics used to grade school corporations and individual schools should be transparent and easy to understand. ISBA supports the use of multiple measures in the GPS Data Dashboard to judge the quality of schools to reduce the over-reliance on summative assessment scores.

Regardless of which metrics are used to judge the quality of schools, all schools (public, public charter, and private) receiving state tuition support dollars should adhere to the same academic and financial accountability metrics. The public has a right to expect transparency and compliance with the public notice requirements, record keeping and audits needed for financial accountability, and access to public records from all state-funded schools. Whether an audit is conducted by the State Board of Accounts (SBOA) or by a contracted accounting firm, all audits should be submitted to the SBOA and made publicly available through the state’s Gateway system. In addition, any school or school system receiving state tuition support should post an annual budget accessible to the public and have a public hearing on the budget before adoption. Dollars flowing to each school system type should be itemized separately in the state budget. Taxpayers deserve full transparency regarding how their tax dollars are spent on these programs.

ISBA recognizes and commends the efforts of public schools to fulfill the unique constitutional duty to educate every child.

### **Maintain Nonpartisan School Boards**

The ISBA supports the continuation of the election and/or appointment of school board members on a nonpartisan basis. Nonpartisan elections help ensure that voters choose school board members based on their qualifications, experience, and vision for addressing local educational needs, instead of their party label. School board members are entrusted with deciding what is in the best interest of students in their community. The focus of a school board member should remain on the child. Introducing political party affiliation may cause school boards to feel conflicted with where their allegiances and priorities lie.

### **Protect School Calendar/Instructional Time**

The ISBA supports the legislative mandate to conduct a minimum of 180 student instructional days and believes the local governing body should retain the authority to determine the school calendar. The ISBA supports giving increased flexibility to school boards to determine the length of the instructional day for professional development and student achievement benefits. The ISBA supports the flexibility to use virtual instruction when deemed appropriate by school officials.

### **Support Career and Technical Education (CTE)**

ISBA believes career and technical education (CTE) should enable students to complete a postsecondary credential during high school or move toward gainful employment upon graduation. All students should have the opportunity to engage in career exploration with support from highly qualified and professionally trained educators and through access to meaningful work-based learning, internships, or modern youth apprenticeships. Secondary CTE courses should expand focus from filling short-term needs of business and industry that are entry-level and low-wage basic jobs to creating career pathways that lead to transferable skills and certifications to foster life-long learning. Policymakers and state agency leaders should support fiscal and administrative policies to incentivize cooperation between school corporations and employers, as well as to help with the purchase of new equipment, curricular resources and materials, the cost of all credentialing exams, and student transportation.

### **Expand K-12 Tax Credit Programs**

The ISBA supports an income tax credit for charitable contributions to public education foundations. In addition, ISBA supports a tax deduction for parents of public school students for educational expenses, including educational materials not paid for by the school corporation through the state curricular materials reimbursement fund.