

2020 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Adopted
by the ISBA
Delegate
Assembly



By Terry Spradlin, Executive Director



The Indiana School Boards Association (ISBA) is dedicated to supporting and improving the quality of education provided to Hoosier children in every classroom throughout the state. ISBA recognizes the leadership role of the General Assembly in enacting legislation that impacts K-12 public education

and is committed to representing the interests of its school board members when addressing legislative initiatives. The rapidly approaching 2020 session will be a “short session” that begins in January and will conclude by mid-March. While the volume of

K-12 education legislation should be much less than the nearly 200 bills introduced in the 2019 session, there will be both opportunities to advance the ISBA agenda, as well as challenges to our ideology of public education as the pillar of democracy. We need to be ready to be a strong voice and united champion for K-12 public education and to advocate for the ISBA 2020 legislative priorities.

Simply put, the ISBA supports programs and policies to provide exceptional learning opportunities for Hoosier children. Given that more than 94 percent of all K-12 students attend a public school, the parents 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 programs and curricular offerings to students. Through these

opportunities, we are preparing a new generation of students to be college and career ready that will in turn help drive the economic growth and prosperity of the state.

To develop the legislative priorities and foundational statements to support public education, the ISBA Legislative Committee met for several hours on July 13th and work continued on these documents into the month of August. Once the committee adopted both, these core documents were presented to the ISBA Delegate Assembly on September 30, 2019. The Foundational Statements and 2020 Legislative Priorities were adopted by separate motions and are available for viewing at: <https://www.isba-ind.org/legislative-priorities-and-foundational-statements.html>

I want to highlight and summarize a few of ISBA's top legislative priorities for 2020. Do know that we will be talking about these issues, and the full legislative agenda, in more detail during the Fall Regional Meetings that begin November 4 through November 20. I will also share at those meetings, updates on our grassroots advocacy program, the ISBA Legislative Action Network.

INCREASED FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT K-12 STUDENTS

The ISBA supports the adequate funding of public schools that is annually adjusted to keep pace with or ahead of inflation. According to a 2018 report from the National Center for Education Statistics, Indiana ranked 36th in the nation (in 2015) for instructional spending per pupil at \$9,529, compared to the U.S. average of \$11,454. State tuition support appropriations have not kept pace with inflation since 2010 when using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator. In fact, state tuition support in inflation-adjusted dollars has diminished from \$7,687 per pupil in 2010 to \$6,741 per pupil in 2019.

The Indiana General Assembly is to be commended for the \$763 million in new funding for K-12 education over the next two years and more than a 4 percent increase in total funding (tuition support and categorical funding) per year. This significant improvement in funding will need to be sustained and elevated in future years to improve Indiana's ranking on per pupil spending and teacher salary.

If the state budget is opened during the 2020 legislative session to expend state excess reserve funds, ISBA supports using a portion of said funds to increase the Teacher Appreciation Grant Program, the Next Generation Hoosier Educator Scholarship Program, as well as the On My Way Pre-K program.

ENHANCED TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAMS

School administrators are becoming increasingly concerned that fewer individuals are entering the teaching profession. In light of the significant role a teacher plays in the education of a child, efforts need to be made to attract more persons to the field of education. Similarly, efforts need to be made to keep teachers in the classroom. School boards need greater flexibility in the current compensation system to reward teachers with advanced education degrees and those with experience in the classroom. CTE funding prioritization and a graduation pathway need to be established that encourage and prepare students for careers in the teaching profession. Professional development funding should be prioritized to support high school teachers requiring additional credentials that have been mandated to continue teaching dual credit and AP courses. Finally, ISBA would support increased funding for the Next Generation Hoosier Educator Scholarships, as well as the William A. Crawford Minority Teacher Scholarships, administered by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE).

EXPAND STATE-SUPPORTED PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS IN INDIANA

The ISBA supports increased state funding to expand prekindergarten programs across the state to serve the approximately 27,000 low-income four-year olds who currently are without access to a high-quality prekindergarten program (Early Learning Indiana, 2018). There is a significant return-on-the-investment for every dollar invested in high-quality prekindergarten programs.

The Indiana General Assembly now provides \$22 million annually for the prekindergarten program for four-year old children. Eligible families seeking child enrollment in the "On My Way Pre-K" program can apply for a 2019-2020 pre-K grant through the FSSA's Office of Early Childhood and Out-Of-School Learning. To be eligible:

- Families must have an income below 127 percent of the federal poverty level;
- The child must be four-years old by August 1, 2019, and starting kindergarten in the 2020-2021 school year;
- Parents/guardians in the household must be working, going to school or attending job training.

Once enrolled, families may choose from any of the eligible, enrolled "On My Way Pre-K" programs in their county.

This program should be expanded by modifying family income guidelines, extending eligibility to children living with grandparents or foster parents (without the work, school, or job training requirements for the guardian), and increasing overall program funding to provide more enrollment slots or to fund capacity building grants in counties where no programs have qualified as Level 3 or 4 Paths to Quality programs. Finally, the legislature should eliminate any funding of online prekindergarten or kindergarten programs as these programs are not research based with evidence of effectiveness. The monies from the online early childhood programs should be invested in the On My Way Pre-K program.

SCHOOL BOARD VOTE ON LOCAL REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONS

Local school board representatives should have voting rights on local (municipal or county) redevelopment commissions. Presently, school board representatives serve as non-voting members of these commissions. Redevelopment commissions have the authority to propose and enact TIF (tax increment financing) districts, upon approval of the city or county council, to capture tax revenue for



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projects that will hopefully enhance local economic development. Conceptually, this economic development then acts as a catalyst to jump-start neighborhood and community growth and ultimately lowers taxes based on higher property values.

There are effective TIFs and ineffective TIFs. If not done appropriately with limited duration, TIFs can have a negative financial impact on school corporations and actually erode revenues available to local units of government according to a 2016 study by the Center for Business and Economic Research at Ball State University.

A school board representative, as a voting member, should be included in a redevelopment commission's decisions. This is a sensible policy proposal given schools are one of the most important drivers of economic growth in a community. Their ability to maintain educational excellence in a growing economic environment is critical. It is well documented that the majority of families select communities, in part, based on the quality of their schools.

CAPITAL REFERENDUM (CONTROLLED PROJECT) BALLOT LANGUAGE

ISBA proposes adding a 10-year estimated net property tax rate as a fourth item of information included in the ballot question posed by school corporations pursuing a referendum. If school corporations are retiring debt during the lifespan of an approved referendum, the net tax rate impact may be lessened. Due to the cost of the project, the net tax rate is an additional piece of information needed so that taxpayers/voters can understand the long-term cost impact to them. Inclusion of this information on the ballot will provide a more accurate depiction of the tax rates and levies of the school corporation.

CONCLUSION

Please take time to acquaint yourself with the full details of the ISBA Foundational Statements and 2020 Legislative Priorities. ISBA Staff will follow up with members soon to update our board legislative liaison contact list and through the ISBA Legislative Action Network we intend to continue to strive to elevate ISBA's advocacy efforts. Together we are better when we stand with a unified voice. Your local engagement and leadership are paramount to our success. Thank you for your ongoing contributions and response to the call to action to support K-12 public education in Indiana! 🎓