

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.