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JOURNAL

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ON THE COVER:

ISBA would like to recognize all of our contributors, editor, staff, and design team who made this year's Silver Trendy Award possible. The Trendy Awards have been honoring the best of association communications for more than 40 years. There are approximately 25 categories, ISBA earning Silver for Best Annual Quarterly Magazine or Journal.

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ASSOCIATION TRENDS
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“I WIN. GOOGLE ME.”

By Steve Corona, ISBA President, Fort Wayne Community Schools Board of Trustees



Most Indiana residents (even Purdue fans) are now familiar with the famous remark IU football coach Curt Cignetti offered when sportswriters asked him about his record as a coach. Cignetti made the comment at a 2023 news conference introducing him as the coach of IU’s football team. He was not well known at the time.

My, how things have changed.

I sure wish I could use that quote in defense of my school district’s record on referendums. But I can’t because our record started out with a shellacking by voters in 2007. Fort Wayne Community Schools asked voters to say yes to a \$500 million bond to repair our schools.

Our school district got our butt kicked. It was a great lesson in humility that we have never forgotten. We asked for too much money. Opponents told us we should focus on academics before we stretched out our hand for cash.

We took that advice and rededicated ourselves to working on our reading and math scores. We created a mission statement and established core beliefs. We challenged our principals to stay focused on our mission.

Five years passed before we went back to voters with a modest request of \$119 million to repair and replace the roofs, windows, plumbing, and HVAC systems at 26 schools. We did not ask for anything new or fancy. This time, voters said yes.

The average increase in property taxes was \$27 dollars a year, or just \$2.27 a month. I told voters the monthly amount was less than a beer

at most bars and restaurant.

Our district went back for additional referendum requests in 2016 (\$129 million) and again in 2020 (\$130 million). Each request was met with voter support, with the percentage of yes votes just below or above 70%.

I would argue that embracing failure is not the default setting of my brain. I was watching the awards ceremony of the Olympic Gold Medal men’s hockey game. I felt terrible for the Canadian players as silver medals were draped around their necks. Second was hardly better than last, and their faces showed it.

So how can the human spirit build on defeat?

I recall an article in the *Wall Street Journal* dating back to that fateful year of 2007. The title of the article was Doctors learn to say ‘I’m sorry.’

Whoa.

That’s not what we expect from a medical professional. What the article went on to say was that an apology brought closure to the patient and family. And hospital risk managers and insurance companies selling malpractice coverage saw a decrease in claims from hospitals establishing a “disclosure and apology” system.

Let’s face it: something is going to go wrong just about every day in our school buildings. Stonewalling our parents is not the route we should take. To err is human.

Let’s be sincere about saying we’re sorry.

According to Matt Abrahams, Stanford University Graduate School of Business, the four “A’s” of a sincere and effective apology are the following:

- 1. ACKNOWLEDGE:** Recognize and admit the specific issue or mistake. Clearly state what happened to show that you understand the situation and take responsibility for your actions.
- 2. APOLOGIZE:** Offer a genuine apology. Use clear and direct language to express regret for the impact of your actions or mistake. Avoid making excuses.
- 3. ACTION:** Outline the steps you will take to correct the issue or ensure it does not happen again. This demonstrates your commitment to resolving the situation and preventing future occurrences.
- 4. AMENDS:** Offer to make things right if possible. This could involve restitution, compensation, or any other effort to repair the damage caused.

Abrahams asserts this framework ensures that apologies are meaningful, sincere, and focused on rebuilding trust and resolving the situation.

Our responsibility as educators is to clearly and constantly communicate our needs and to apologize when necessary.

If you are affiliated with a local school district, please resolve to invite your state representative and state senator to your classrooms. Seeing is believing. Let them see the terrific work our teachers accomplish every day with students. Let them understand the challenges we face with children who come to us with academic and emotional needs.

A successful marketing campaign is built on repetition. This approach was a staple in the speeches of John Mutz, former Lieutenant Governor of Indiana. He would first tell his audience what he was going to say, he would then tell us, and in conclusion, he would tell us what he just told us.

I’ve never forgotten even though I haven’t heard him speak in years. 🍷

“Our responsibility as educators is to clearly and constantly communicate our needs and to apologize when necessary.”

—Steve Corona

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GEARING UP FOR A STATE-LEVEL CONVERSATION ON REDUCING SCHOOL DISTRICT EXPENDITURES AND INCREASING EFFICIENCIES

By Terry Spradlin, ISBA Executive Director



In my last column in the winter edition of *The Journal*, I made a case that to maintain the strong return on the investment that Indiana’s K-12 public education system produces, stable funding for public schools is essential. I listed several student achievement indicators and trends that put our public schools among the best in the United States. What makes this story so compelling is that Indiana ranks 37th in the nation on per pupil spending and, according to a 2025 Reason Foundation Report, last in the nation in the increase in education spending from 2002 to 2023.

In my regular conversation with school leaders and when reading the headlines in ISBA’s *School News Daily*, it is apparent that the quality of public education and our significant gains in student achievement are at risk. Some of these headlines have alluded to millions of dollars in loss of revenue or budget cuts, staff reductions, rising insurance and utility expenses, and reduced bus routes or delays to school bus replacements, to mention some of the financial challenges. We are only in the first 12 months of the implementation of Senate Enrolled Act (SEA) 1-2025, and school corporations are continuing to adjust to the constraints this law has imposed on the property tax rates and levies of local units of government. Without the “replacement revenue” provided through local option income taxes granted to counties and municipalities, school corporations are the local unit of government hit hardest by the property tax reforms. Absent modifications to SEA 1 or supplemental funding sources, the next three years will be daunting, pushing many school corporations to a fiscal cliff.

I have heard conversation within the State House that school corporations “just need to be more efficient” evidenced by legislation recently enacted in the 2026 short session to require the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to conduct an efficiency study of school corporations and charter schools. Could this study be a precursor to legislation to mandate school corporation

consolidation in counties below a certain population or districts below a certain number of students?

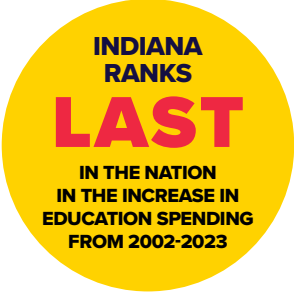
While you are coping with the “new norm” of your revenue projections for the Operations and Debt Service Funds, navigating these financial forecasts or challenges will require good fiscal stewardship, effective communications, and community advocacy. A unified

leadership approach is needed to gear up, know your numbers, and tell your financial story to your public. This fiscal transparency and accountability will build community understanding, trust, and allegiance. How did we get here and what can we do to be ready for the road ahead?

REVENUE DECLINES PROJECTED

As previously stated, the substantial progress in student achievement underway is at risk with shifting economic conditions, revenue declines, and changes to school funding that have slowed the meaningful investment made by the state over the past six years in K-12 education. Balancing state fiscal management with the investment in state programs and priorities is challenging. Indiana has long prided itself on maintaining low property taxes. While major property tax reforms over the years have succeeded in lowering taxes—Indiana now ranks 39th nationally in property tax as a percentage of personal income—there’s a resulting consequence of the erosion of

essential public services. School corporations alone are projected to lose over \$770 million in property tax revenue over the next three years because of SEA 1. That’s on top of the “circuit breaker” losses of \$4.2 billion since 2009 due to the imposition of tax caps. School corporations are already stretched thin. Most of their Operations Fund goes to insurance, utilities, and transportation, leaving little for facility upkeep or new construction. SEA 1, when fully implemented, will prompt school corporations to spend down reserves, cut staff, delay building projects, and rely on aging buses.



SOURCE:
2025 REASON FOUNDATION REPORT

With fewer dollars in the Operations Fund, schools will be forced to transfer more from Education Fund—money meant for classrooms and teachers. That means potentially smaller pay raises, larger class sizes, and a less experienced teaching workforce. The growing instability of levy dollars will also negatively impact the credit or bond ratings of school corporations, driving up the costs of borrowing. Many districts will turn to referendums—asking voters to approve new taxes just to maintain core services. ISBA anticipates as many as 60 to 70 school corporation referenda in November.

2026 SESSION OUTCOMES FORESHADOW BIGGER CONVERSATION NEXT SESSION

The 2026 short session of the Indiana General Assembly that adjourned on Friday, February 27, produced two laws that are pertinent to the school finance conversation you are grappling with today. First, House Enrolled Act (HEA) 1210, the Department of Local Government Finance agency bill of more than 400 pages, includes two changes to the effective dates of SEA 1 provisions that will benefit school corporations temporarily. First, the law delays the elimination of the mandatory redistribution of local income taxes to school corporations in former CAGIT counties from CY 2028 to CY 2029. This change of effective date will mean that school corporations will receive approximately \$60 million collectively for an additional year before the revenue is gone.

HEA 1210 also contains a “protected taxes” provision

concerning the Debt Service Fund and levy losses associated with the new 10% homeowner property tax credit. In essence, this provision maintains a district's ability to protect their Operations Fund from taking all the losses due to the credit (by balancing the losses with use of any cash balance in the Debt Service Fund). The SEA 1 “protected taxes” provision for the Debt Service Fund will now be effective in 2027. These are helpful, albeit temporary, aids to your financial management efforts.

House Enrolled Act 1242 (Public Law 55), on the other hand, will continue, if not intensify, the conversation on school district revenues and expenditures this year in advance of the 2027 budget session. This law calls for the completion of two studies that are due by December 1, 2026. First, Indiana's Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF), in consultation with the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), is required to conduct a study of the disparities in per student operational funding amounts in school corporations within each county and provide an estimate of the amount of additional funding that would be required to bring school corporations with per student operational funding below a median level up to the median level. This study could be helpful if it produces a “funding floor” that all school corporations are leveled up to but could also signal a move to level the Operations Fund at a foundation amount all districts would be limited to receive. Let's see what the recommendations are when the study is released.

The second study requires IDOE to prepare a report that compiles certain statewide data on school corporations and charter schools with recommendations to include: (A) increase school corporation and charter school administrative efficiencies; (B) reduce school corporation and charter school administrative costs; and (C) improve student outcomes. The basis for this study infers that school corporations are inefficient and spending too much on administrative expenses and should deploy strategies to reduce these costs. Some policymakers have suggested that school corporations with declining or small enrollments, or that are among multiple school corporations in a county with small population (e.g., 50,000 or less), should consolidate central office administration.

ISBA ANTICIPATES
AS MANY AS
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CORPORATION
REFERENDA
IN NOVEMBER



K-12 EDUCATION MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS TAKING PROACTIVE APPROACH

In preparation for the policy conversation that these studies will generate, several statewide K-12 education management associations have come together to commission our own study. ISBA has been joined by the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents (IAPSS), the Indiana Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), the Indiana Small and Rural School Association (ISRSA), the Indiana Urban Schools Association (IUSA), and the Coalition of Growing and Suburban Schools to collaborate on this research that will be conducted by the PAVE Education Consulting Group. This research will look at Indiana's rankings in the Midwest and nationally on K-12 revenues and expenditures, while examining enrollment trending, staffing, service delivery, and student achievement outcomes from a state and local lens. In addition, the group of associations will be conducting a statewide survey to catalogue the scope and depth of efficiency strategies currently being utilized by school corporations. Examples of efficiency strategies the survey will gauge include participation in health insurance or property and casualty pools/trusts, energy consortia, joint purchasing, shared personnel, etc.

The results of the survey and study will be available this summer, and the findings and recommendations will be shared with agency leaders, policymakers and their fiscal leaders and staff, and the governor's office. We hope this information helps inform the conversation on school corporation efficiencies and influences any potential conversation about school corporation consolidation. Results of this work will also be shared with ISBA members via the annual School Budgeting and Finance Seminar to be held on June 18, a concurrent session at the Fall Conference, and via future columns that I will write and distribute to you. ISBA anticipates that the study will show an array of cost efficiency measures that are already being deployed and favorable comparisons in all expense categories nationally.

GOOD FISCAL STEWARDSHIP IS NECESSARY

School boards and leadership of school corporations have shared responsibility to provide good fiscal stewardship and to respond to whatever the financial situation or constraints before them. If you demonstrate effective financial management, the need for state intervention or mandates will be lessened. Elements of good fiscal stewardship include model board governance, proactive planning, and transparency and accountability.

► Model Board Governance

The financial oversight of a school corporation and adoption of the annual budget are core responsibilities of every school board. School board members are entrusted by the community with financial resources to provide effective educational services to students. They are expected to approve a budget that spends tax dollars in an efficient and responsible manner. ISBA contends that the annual budget should be aligned with the goals articulated in a strategic plan, with emphasis on strategies to elevate student achievement outcomes. From an oversight perspective, it is incumbent of board members to ask the right questions and request and receive adequate financial data before making an informed decision.

► Proactive Planning

The proactive planning efforts of school boards are to review and understand the monthly board packet and the information it includes in the financial report and approval of claims. You should receive and review the Fund reports, the monthly and year-to-date expenditures included in the Appropriations Report and/or Cash Flow Statement, and other financial benchmarks (e.g., ADM trending, tax cap impact, capital projects plan, and major grants). Fund balances should be easily identified and monitored. ISBA has developed a “monthly checklist” for your use to ensure that you are seeking the essential information and asking the right questions every month throughout the year. This checklist and other helpful resources are available in the biannual ISBA publication, “Budgeting and Financial Oversight for School Board Members Resource Guide.”

► Transparency and Accountability

This essential element of good fiscal stewardship includes the school board's role in ensuring sound internal controls. No one person, including the superintendent, should control all aspects of the budgeting and financial management process. Your board policy manual should include policies and procedures that speak to your internal control guardrails to provide checks and balances in your system. The school board's role is to be the check and balance for the annual budget, monthly fund reports, and the appropriations report. You are to receive the annual investments report and financial conditions report from the superintendent or their designee every January. In addition, the board should receive and review the audit report whenever issued by the State Board of Accounts (SBOA). If a corrective action plan is required by the SBOA, the board should ask for progress reports by the

AS WE PREPARE FOR THE IMPORTANT CONVERSATION ON SCHOOL CORPORATION EFFICIENCIES, YOU NEED TO “KNOW YOUR NUMBERS” AND YOUR SCHOOL CORPORATION’S FINANCES TO “TELL YOUR STORY.”

administration to ensure that corrections have been made.

ISBA recognizes the importance of professional development for school board members to optimize your fiscal stewardship efforts. In addition to the resource guide and the annual School Budgeting and Finance Seminar, ISBA has partnered with faculty at the Indiana University Bloomington School of Education to create a School Finance for School Board Members ‘Micro-Credentialing’ Program. This program was designed to strengthen the capacity of school board members in school finance and develop a set of credentials that signal to others your preparedness and capabilities. Information on both this program and the resources can be found on the ISBA website at www.isba-ind.org.

LOCAL RESPONSE – THE IMPORTANCE OF TELLING YOUR STORY

As we prepare for the important conversation on school corporation efficiencies, you need to “know your numbers” and your school corporation’s finances to “tell your story.” Some key questions that you may want to consider and incorporate into your story narrative are:

- What is the ADM count and trend projections of your school corporation?
- What are your fund balances?
- What is the school corporation spending a majority of the Operations Fund on?
- What are the tax rates for the Operations Fund and Debt Service Fund?
- What is the property tax revenue per student in these funds?
- What is the five-year trend for these numbers when adjusting for inflation?
- Are the levy dollars in these funds increasing or decreasing?
- If decreasing, how is the school corporation adjusting or cutting expenses to offset the revenue losses?
- How much is the school corporation transferring from the Education Fund to the Operations Fund?
- Are you collaborating with county and municipal government leaders to ensure they are mindful of your school corporation’s financial story?

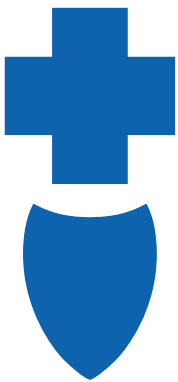
If you do not know the answers to these questions, you may want to consider asking for a work session with your administration to seek and discuss this information. Once you are prepared to fulfill your fiduciary responsibilities it is important to be proactive in building broader community understanding of your school corporation’s financial condition.

► School Community Stakeholder Engagement

The stakeholders in your school community can play important roles as advocates and champions in telling your financial story, too. The quality of schools impacts property values and the quality of life they experience in your community. Your school corporation’s strategic plan should involve community stakeholders and reflect their vision and values. The public should understand that most of your Education Fund budget is spent on people. Schools at their core are human-service organizations. When cuts are made, your board is not just trimming “line items” in the budget, you are likely eliminating staff. Reductions in force also precipitate reductions in programs and services. Make sure your community is aware of the changes and the overarching fiscal challenges. Many school corporations are recognizing the importance of building trust by engaging stakeholders through social media and newsletter updates, holding public forums, providing website-based budget and finance transparency portals, and cultivating leadership programs that include segments on school budgeting matters.

OUR COLLECTIVE READINESS AND RESPONSE TO PROTECT PUBLIC EDUCATION

I hope this column inspires you to strengthen your collaboration with fellow board members and district leaders, as you continue to guide your corporation toward sound, sustainable fiscal management. ISBA is ready to assist you in fulfilling your financial oversight responsibilities. Please reach out to me at tspradlin@isba-ind.org if there are any additional resources or professional development opportunities that we can provide to better support you. Let’s stand united to do all that we can to provide an exemplary education for our 1 million students in our public schools. 🍌



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LEADING, LEARNING, AND GROWING: Lessons from LeaderCon’26

By Derek Morgan, Assistant Director of Board Services



As a school board member, it is important to remember that you are a leader in education in your community. At times, the decisions that come before you may seem inconsequential, such as declaring old materials surplus, changing position control numbers, or approving a policy update that alters only a single word or date. Yet the more consequential decisions made by you and your fellow board members have the potential to create community-wide and even generational change. The path to that kind of impact, however, is not always paved in gold.

As a leader, I have always tried to embrace change, learn from my mistakes, and play to my strengths. Whether you are a new board member or a long-serving one, I encourage you to have the humility to acknowledge that you will not always have all the answers. Fortunately, the Indiana School Boards Association exists to help board members build the skills and knowledge needed to lead effectively. My own journey to educational leadership has been shaped by moments of uncertainty, growth, and learning, and those experiences continue to inform how I approach board service today.

FINDING MY PATH IN EDUCATION

As the newly hired Assistant Director of Board Services, I am excited to join Steve Horton in the work that he has been doing to guide and educate boards. I also want to take a moment to share a bit about myself and the journey that led me here. I can still remember when the idea that I might have a future in education was first planted.

As a senior at Edgewood High School, I participated in a peer mentoring program that paired high school students with incoming eighth graders. One spring, a classmate and I helped lead a group of students through an all-day orientation. After the event, my principal at the time, Brad Tucker, who now serves on the school board for Richland-Bean Blossom Community Schools, shared that one of the students had commented on my ability to lead the classroom and encouraged me to consider a career in education. While I was not convinced then, that conversation stayed with me and quietly shaped future decisions.

My path after high school was not a straight one. I began college as a meteorology major at Purdue University before transferring to Indiana University and ultimately pursuing secondary education. Graduating in 2008 meant entering a difficult job market, and it took time to find the right fit. I eventually landed at Owen Valley High School as a Jobs for America’s Graduates teacher, beginning a chapter that shaped my understanding of leadership, adaptability, and service. That work later led to a statewide role with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development as a Training Coordinator, a position that ended when program funding was cut and required me to once again rethink my next steps.

During that transition, I was also serving on the school board at Spencer-Owen Community Schools, a role I have held since 2021. I take great pride in giving back to the community that helped shape me and working to ensure every student has access to a high-quality education. In my six years of board service, much like the rest of my journey in education, things have not always gone smoothly. Throughout it all, I have valued the guidance, training, and resources provided by ISBA, and I am grateful to now support board members across the state as they continue to learn, grow, and serve their communities.

STEPPING INTO A NEW ROLE

One of my first reminders that growth often comes through discomfort happened almost immediately after stepping into my new role. Within my first month at ISBA, I learned that I would

be presenting at LeaderCon’26, an experience that required me to hit the ground running and apply lessons learned both in and out of the boardroom.

LeaderCon’26 brought together school board members and school leaders from across Indiana for a full day of learning focused on practical strategies, real-world examples, and tools participants could take back to their own districts.

WHAT EFFECTIVE SCHOOL BOARDS DO DIFFERENTLY

The day began with insights from Dr. D.T. Magee, Executive Director of the Iowa Association of School Boards, who guided attendees through the Lighthouse Research and what effective school boards do differently. The research underscores an important truth: school boards can, and do, make a meaningful difference in student learning.

Many board members serve because they want to make a positive impact for students, yet they sometimes feel disconnected from that outcome. The Lighthouse Research addresses that frustration by identifying specific practices that help boards translate intention into impact. According to the research, highly effective boards consistently demonstrate five key principles: setting clear, high expectations; creating conditions for success; holding the system accountable; building collective will; and learning together as a board team.

As board members, it is vital to regularly reflect on how that work is being done. Have you set clear expectations for yourselves and your school corporation? Have you taken time to establish goals focused on student achievement? Are you identifying gaps in knowledge that may affect your ability to make informed decisions? I will be the first to admit that I have not always had clear answers to these questions. That reality is not a failure, but an opportunity. Strong boards play to their strengths while remaining willing to acknowledge areas for growth and address them together.

School board members often talk about transparency, but what does that look like in practice? The second session at LeaderCon’26, Stronger Together: Connecting Schools and Communities Through Trust and Transparency, offered practical strategies for strengthening communication and building trust. A consistent message throughout the presentation was that trust is built through clear, proactive, and intentional communication.

Superintendent Dan Hile and Executive Director of Marketing and Communications Marnie Cooke, both from the Noblesville Schools, shared examples of how districts can connect more

meaningfully with stakeholders and increase confidence in decision making. This raises important questions for every board. Do you have a cohesive communication strategy? Are you prepared to communicate clearly during challenging moments? Transparency is not simply about sharing information; it is about building understanding and trust with the community you serve.

STRUCTURE BUILDS TRUST

For the third session of the conference, I was pleased to present with Steve Horton on the topic of Robert's Rules of Order, or as Steve likes to call them, "Robert's Tools." Although putting Robert's Rules into action may feel intimidating at first, Steve and I made the case that they strengthen board governance by keeping discussion orderly, decisions transparent, and meetings moving efficiently from one item to the next.

One memorable moment came when we played a news clip from a dysfunctional school board meeting (thankfully not from Indiana), where board members were openly sniping at one another. As soon as the reporter noted that the district also had a referendum on the ballot, the entire LeaderCon'26 audience let out a collective groan. The work of a school board happens in full public view, and how that work is conducted matters. Consistent use of parliamentary procedure reinforces fairness, professionalism, and public trust, especially when decisions are difficult.

AVOIDING THE LEADERSHIP CLIFF

No matter how strong your relationship with your superintendent may be, every board will eventually face a leadership transition. Because school boards are responsible for hiring and evaluating only one employee, that moment carries significant weight. A session on superintendent succession planning, by Tipton Community Schools board president Robert Cochrane II, emphasized that planning ahead is not about anticipating departure, but about ensuring stability, preserving institutional knowledge, and maintaining continuity for students, staff, and the community. If your superintendent announced a departure tomorrow, would your board be prepared to lead confidently through that transition?

LEADING THROUGH FISCAL CHALLENGES

Finally, boards are facing increasing financial pressure due to Senate Enrolled Act 1 and other legislative changes affecting



school finance. Fiscal stewardship has never been easy, and the years ahead will require thoughtful leadership and clear communication. A panel discussion featuring superintendents and CFOs navigating these challenges emphasized the importance of grounding financial decisions in district priorities, communicating openly with stakeholders, and keeping students at the center of every conversation. While the financial landscape may be uncertain, strong leadership and intentional communication can help boards guide their communities forward with confidence.

PUTTING LESSONS INTO ACTION

LeaderCon'26 served as a powerful reminder that effective governance is not about having all the answers, but about a willingness to reflect, learn, and grow together. The lessons shared throughout the day reinforced that strong school boards are built through clear expectations, intentional communication, thoughtful leadership, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Those lessons are just as relevant in day-to-day board work as they are in moments of challenge or change.

As I step into my role as Assistant Director of Board Services, I am excited to continue supporting school boards and superintendents across Indiana as they work to strengthen their skills and govern with confidence. Whether your board is navigating leadership transitions, refining communication practices, improving meeting effectiveness, or simply looking for ways to grow together, Steve Horton and I are here to help. I encourage you to reach out, ask questions, and take advantage of the resources and support available through ISBA. Together, we can continue building strong governance that serves students, communities, and public education well into the future. 🌱



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CONSTITUTIONALLY PROTECTED PRAYER IN SCHOOLS:

Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education

By Lisa Tanselle, Esq., ISBA General Counsel

The Every Student Succeeds Act requires the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education to provide and revise guidance to state and local educational agencies on the rights of public school students and employees to engage in prayer and other religious expression.¹ The last guidance was issued in 2023 by then Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. In light of recent Supreme Court decisions interpreting the First Amendment, the U.S. Department of Education published updated guidance in February of this year.²

While the guidance is just that, guidance, and not legally binding on any educational entity, to receive federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, every school corporation must certify in writing to the state educational agency that it has no policy that prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in its elementary and secondary schools.³ (This certification is required by October 1 of each year in a manner determined by the state educational agency.) Failure to file the required certification can lead to enforcement action by the U.S. Department of Education. In light of this certification requirement, it is important for school board members and school officials to be aware of the Department’s interpretation of constitutionally protected prayer and religious expression in public schools.

The 2026 guidance identifies several principles regarding religious expression and prayer as established by the Supreme Court. First, the guidance notes that “public schools may not require students to pray, nor may a school engage in prayer or sponsor prayer in such a way as to effectively implicate the school itself in a religious practice.” Yet the guidance goes on to state that schools must recognize the rights of students to pray and the rights of teachers to “engage in individual acts of prayer—and to pray with students—during the conduct of their work.” The guidance’s emphasis on the rights of teachers to free exercise of religion in the school setting is one of the differences from previous years’ guidance. The Department cites the Supreme Court’s decision in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*⁴ as support for this statement. In the *Kennedy* case, the Court upheld the right of a football coach to pray at the 50-yard-line of the football field at

the end of the game, with players also participating in the exercise, after finding that (1) the coach was not acting within the scope of his duties because he prayed at a time when he was free to attend briefly to personal matters and (2) the coach was not seeking to convey a government-created message, such as instructing players, discussing strategy, encouraging better on-field performance, or other speech the district paid him to convey as a coach. Historically such conduct was viewed as a school’s endorsement of religion, which is prohibited by the Establishment Clause.

The guidance then refers to three other lines of judicial precedent relevant to religious expression in schools. “First, public schools do have the authority to regulate speech that materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others.” Second, state action reflecting hostility to religious people or their beliefs is unconstitutional. And third, “public schools cannot subject religious speech, including prayer, to more onerous restrictions than similar secular speech.” To help readers better understand the principles set forth in the guidance, the Department of Education offered some concrete scenarios that might occur in a public school setting. In the area of private religious expression by students, the guidance states that “schools must permit students to pray privately and quietly by themselves, whether in class, at an athletic event, or before a meal.” But schools do not have to “allow students to pray in ways that violate ordinary class rules and interrupt class instruction.” Additionally, the guidance reminds school officials to allow students to dress in accordance with their religious faith. Lastly, the guidance states that teachers and other school officials should never coerce or pressure a student to engage in speech or affirm a point of view that violates a student’s sincere religious beliefs.

Under the heading of religious expression in student groups, the guidance states that “school officials must permit prayer in student groups and support the student group on the same terms it supports non-religious groups.” Additionally, “schools should not prefer secular student groups to religious student groups or discriminate among religious groups of different faiths.” Lastly, the guidance states that schools “cannot require a student group

To receive federal funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, every school corporation must certify in writing to the state educational agency that it has no policy that prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in its elementary and secondary schools.

to adopt a particular viewpoint in order to be recognized by the school if the viewpoint violates the student members' religious beliefs."

In discussing religious expression at school events, the guidance notes that "public schools may not sponsor or organize compulsory prayer at official events" and that a student, teacher, or other school representative may not "deliver prayers on behalf of the school or in such a way that attendance at the prayer is mandatory." But, in recognition of the rights of individuals to pray, the guidance states "student-initiated religious remarks must be treated the same as other permissible speech." A specific example given here was: a valedictorian who wants to thank God in a graduation speech should be permitted to do so, but the valedictorian may not require other participants to bow their heads in prayer and thank God with the valedictorian. The guidance also notes that when "student speakers are selected on the basis of neutral criteria and retain primary control over the content of their expression, their expression is not attributable to the school." Alternatively, when "school officials are speaking in their official capacities or substantially control the content of student speech, such speech is attributable to the school and may not include prayer or other specifically religious or anti-religious content." The guidance suggests that, "to avoid any mistaken perception that the school endorses religious speech that is not in fact attributable to the school," school officials may elect to "make appropriate, neutral disclaimers" to clarify that a speaker's remarks are that of the individual and not of the school.

In the scenario on religious expression in assignments, the guidance states that teachers "may not require students to pray or otherwise affirm religious beliefs as part of classroom instruction or written or oral assignments, even if part of an otherwise secular lesson." However, "teachers must allow students to discuss their religious beliefs in presentations, homework, exams, or other assignments free from discrimination based on the student's religious perspective or lack thereof." The guidance reminds teachers that any such work "should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school."

When addressing religious expressions by school employees, the guidance states that these individuals "must be permitted to pray while at work on the same terms as students, unless such prayer acts to coerce others into joining in or affirming their prayer or functions as the official speech of the school as an institution." An example given here was: "a teacher may bow her head to say

grace before lunch, and students may join her in grace, but she may not instruct her class to pray with her, pressure them to pray with her, or create an atmosphere in which students are favored if they pray with her."

The last scenario discussed in the guidance relates to discipline and harassment and reiterates that "schools are entitled to maintain ordinary discipline and are required to protect students from targeted harassment, even when the harassing student or students claim a religious belief for their actions." But the guidance cautions school officials that "speech that reflects sincere religious belief and does not constitute targeted harassment, threats, or advocacy of unlawful physical violence, even if it offends, is typically protected speech."

In its concluding paragraph, the Department of Education summarizes its guidance by advising school officials "to allow the individuals who make up a public school community to act and speak in accordance with their faith, provided they do not invade the rights of others, the school does not itself participate in religious action or speech as an institution, and the school does not favor secular over religious views or one religious view over another."

In addition to this federal guidance, school administrators should also be aware of Indiana statutes that address student religious rights.⁵ Much of the guidance above is consistent with those statutes. For example, Indiana law prohibits discrimination against a student or a student's parent on the basis of religious viewpoint or religious expression, permits students to express religious beliefs in school work, allows students to pray before, during, and after the school day, and permits students to form religious clubs to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other noncurricular groups. Thus, whenever addressing a situation involving religious expression, school administrators should review both the federal guidance and Indiana law, and consult with local counsel before taking action against a student or an employee. 🐼

REFERENCES

1. 20 U.S.C. §7904(a)
2. 2026-guidance-constitutionally-protected-prayer-and-religious-expression-public-elementary-and-secondary-schools-113182.pdf
3. 20 U.S.C. §7904(b)
4. 597 U.S. 507 (2022)
5. I.C. 20-33-1

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Policy Advisor

By Julie M. Slavens, Esq., ISBA Senior Counsel/Director of Policy Services

INDIANA'S NEW IMMIGRATION LAW: HOW IT AFFECTS SCHOOLS

Senate Enrolled Act 76 (SEA 76), which was signed into law by the governor on March 5, 2026, has been the subject of many news articles during the 2026 Indiana General Assembly. SEA 76 was often referred to as the “immigration bill” during the session, as it amended and added various provisions to the existing Indiana law on immigration enforcement. Significant amendments, which are effective as of March 5, 2026, provide that a governmental body, including a school board, may not limit or restrict enforcement of federal immigration laws, regardless of whether the enforcement is carried out by federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies. Under SEA 76, a court may determine that a governmental body violated the law even without proof that it acted knowingly or intentionally. This means a school corporation could be found in violation even if it did not realize it was breaking the law or did not intend to do so (see IC 5-2-18.2-4 and IC 5-2-18.2-6).

Some provisions in SEA 76 address matters affecting public schools directly, including both student issues and employment matters. In addition, some provisions address penalties for violating the immigration law. This article will address the provisions of SEA 76 affecting schools and what locally should be done by schools to comply with the law.

STUDENTS

SEA 76 amends IC 5-2-18.2-3 to prohibit a school corporation from adopting or implementing a policy or administrative regulation or rule, whether the policy or administrative regulation is written or unwritten, that prohibits or restricts its employees from communicating or cooperating with federal officials, maintaining information, exchanging information with another government agency, or gathering information with regard to a student with respect to citizenship or immigration status. This prohibition does not apply if the gathering of information conflicts with federal or state law.

School officials and employees need to keep in mind the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). when addressing law enforcement officers asking about students. FERPA is a federal law prohibiting the release of information in student records maintained by a school corporation. The law provides such information is confidential and should not be released without the consent of the student’s parent. FERPA does allow a school corporation to release some information designed by the school corporation as “directory information” without parent consent unless the parent has notified the school corporation that such information should not be released without



the parent’s consent. It is important to note FERPA does not require the release of directory information; school officials should be consistent in their discretion to release this information when dealing with law enforcement officers whether they are carrying out the immigration laws or any other laws under their jurisdiction, as the public policy of SEA 76 is for governmental entities to be consistent in treating law enforcement officials on immigration matters the same as it treats law enforcement officials on non-immigration matters relating to students.

While there have not been many incidents of immigration officials visiting Indiana schools, given the provisions of SEA 76, school employees should cooperate with such officials in the same manner and using the same procedures as they do with local or state police officers who visit schools. Immigration enforcement officials may provide school employees with a warrant when visiting a school. There are two types of warrants the official may provide: one is an administrative warrant which is signed by immigration official; one is a judicial warrant which is signed by a judge and will have the name of a court on the warrant. The administrative warrant does not give the immigration official the right to enter the property. The judicial warrant will provide for a search to be executed within a specific time frame or for an arrest of a person; the warrant for the arrest of a person does not give the official the right to search the property for other items or other

persons not stated in the warrant. Any papers provided to the school should be read thoroughly to determine what it allows the official to do before allowing the official to execute the warrant.

Given the complex nature of the different types of warrants and the immigration law, it would be best to have a process or procedure for school employees to follow when immigration officials come to the school. [This process should be used whenever a law enforcement officer visits a school on official business.] Assigning roles to school administrators for these visits would be best. The procedures should assign different roles for the various actions: who will review the warrant; who will escort the officer while in the building or doing a search; who will communicate to the students and parents about the visits; and who will contact legal counsel. The plan should also address under what circumstances legal counsel will be contacted.

In addition, document all matters relating to the visit. This documentation should include but not be limited to the name of the official, time of the visit, who the official spoke with, details of the search if one was done including the areas searched and any items seized during the search. It is important the school employees assigned these roles do not interfere with or obstruct the official from performing his duties within the parameters of the warrant. It is also important for the school employee to be sure the official stays within the scope of the warrant. Training school

personnel on the local procedures and the law should be done as well so all relevant employees know the process and what to do when law enforcement officers visit the building.

EMPLOYMENT

SEA 76 adds a new chapter to IC 5-22 on employing an unauthorized alien, which is defined as a person who is not a citizen of the United States and is not lawfully permitted to be in the United States. The new chapter (IC 5-22-9), which goes into effect on July 1, 2026, prohibits employers, including school boards, from knowingly or intentionally recruiting, hiring, or continuing to employ unauthorized aliens. This is a high standard for the school corporation to meet in order to be found in violation of this prohibition.

An employer does not violate this provision if it engages in “reasonable diligence” to confirm the work eligibility of an individual before employing the individual. The law provides “reasonable diligence” includes electronic verification through the authorization program of the United States Department of

Homeland Security or any manner consistent with an industry standard best practice. This means if a school corporation continues to use the I-9 form and related process when hiring it will most likely meet the requirements of this law. A school corporation should also engage in any other process it uses to confirm the individual is legally allowed to work in the United States.

Under the new chapter, an employer cannot retaliate against an employee for communicating or cooperating with the Attorney General’s office in enforcing this law against his or her employer. The new chapter also provides penalties that may be imposed by the Indiana Attorney General when an employer violates IC 5-22-9.

ENFORCEMENT AND PENALTIES

SEA 76 gives authority to the Indiana Attorney General’s office to enforce this law. The Attorney General may bring a court action to enjoin an action that violates the law, impose a civil penalty for noncompliance, and obtain any other relief deemed necessary for the employer to comply with the law.

The law also gives discretion to the Attorney General to defend a school corporation or school board when sued based on potential violations of the immigration laws. The decision of the Attorney General is to be determined when the school board has requested to be represented by the Attorney General and the actions serving as a basis for the lawsuit do not violate federal or state law. This provision is effective July 1, 2026.

REVIEW POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

School boards and administrators should review current policies and administrative procedures on police visits to schools to determine if they comply with the new provisions of SEA 76 and other related federal and state laws. If a separate policy exists on addressing immigration officers’ visits, it should also be reviewed to determine if it complies with SEA 76. A school board should also consider having one policy addressing all law enforcement interactions with its schools. In addition, school administrators should consider how it will manage releasing directory information to any law enforcement officer for consistency in treating all such situations the same. School boards should also consult with legal counsel when developing these policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the related federal and state laws. 🗳️

If you have any questions about the information discussed in this article, please contact Julie M. Slavens, by phone at: 317-639-4362 or by e-mail at jslavens@isba-ind.org.



2026 CALENDAR AT-A-GLANCE

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|--|---|
| APRIL 6-21
Spring Regional Meetings
<i>Statewide</i> | JUNE 18
Budget/Finance Seminar
<i>Embassy Suites, Plainfield</i> |
| MAY 12, MAY 15,
MAY 20, MAY 21,
JUNE 10 & JUNE 12
School Board Candidate
Forums
<i>Virtual</i> | AUGUST 26
Collective Bargaining
Seminar
<i>Embassy Suites, Plainfield</i> |
| MAY 13
School Safety and
Cybersecurity Seminar
<i>Embassy Suites, Plainfield</i> | OCTOBER 5-6
Annual Fall Conference
<i>Indiana Convention Center</i> |
| JUNE 9
June School Law Seminar
<i>Embassy Suites, Plainfield</i> | NOVEMBER 2-18
Fall Regional Meetings
<i>Statewide</i> |
| | DECEMBER 1
December School Law
Seminar
<i>Embassy Suites, Plainfield</i> |

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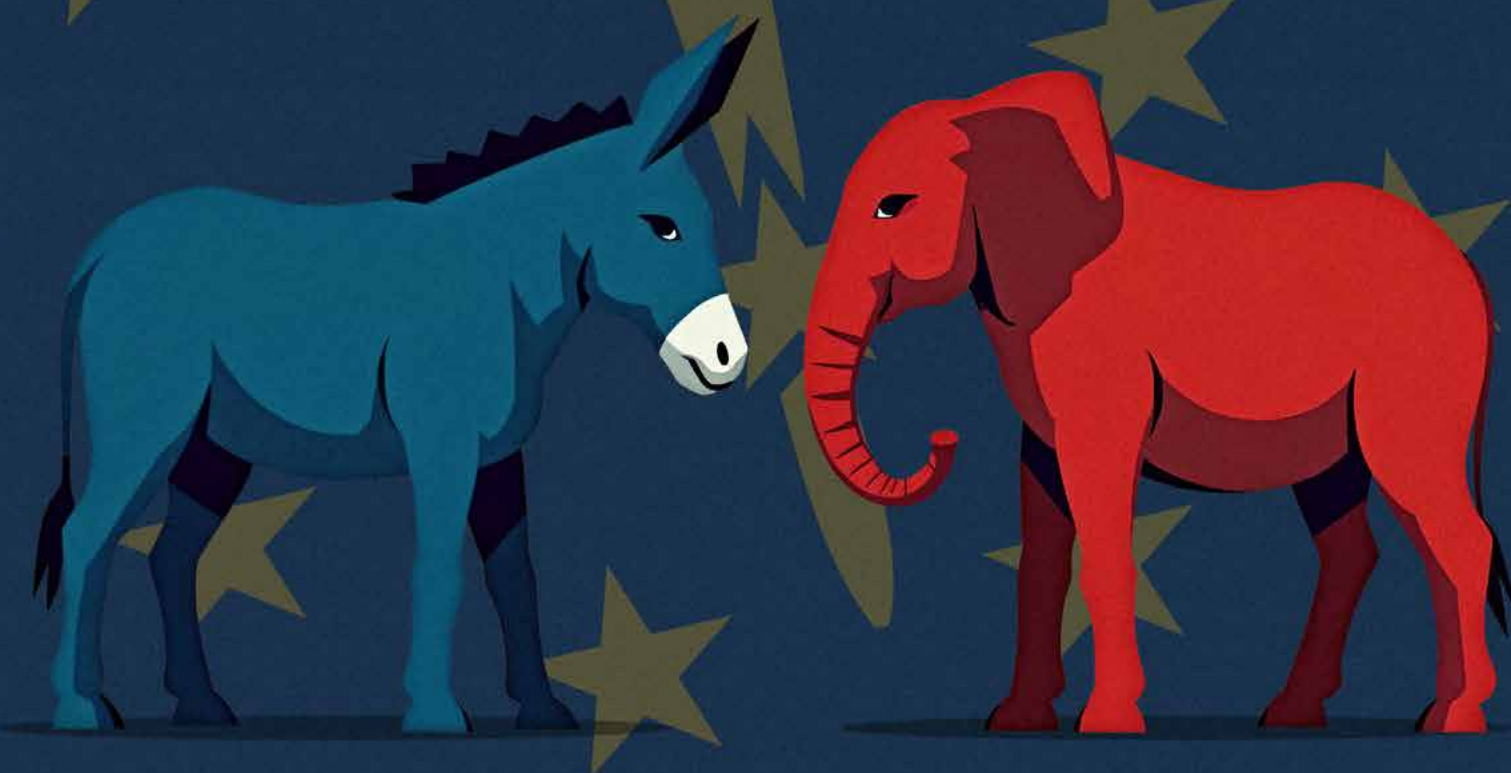
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POLITICAL AFFILIATION IN SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS: THE NEW BALLOT LANDSCAPE

By Adam VanOsdol, ISBA Communications Specialist/Content Strategist



As party labels enter school board ballots for the first time, the decision to run with or without a political affiliation requires careful consideration of several different factors. The choice reflects personal values and one’s expectations for public service at large and school governance in particular.

Some school board candidates will feel compelled to openly share their political philosophy with voters, believing that clarity and transparency about their viewpoint reflects honesty and integrity. Others feel just as strongly that partisan politics should remain separate from school governance and will therefore decline to list an affiliation in order to underscore their focus on educational issues.

Then there are those who will approach the decision primarily through the strategic logic of what most effectively positions them for success on election night. These candidates must carefully assess the makeup of their local electorate to understand not just how their community votes, but how their community thinks about school governance.

When encountering political party labels on school board ballots for the first time this November, many voters will use the labels as a quick way to assess a candidate’s general philosophy and values. A familiar party label can act as an efficient shortcut to differentiate among candidates, especially for school board seats where multiple candidates share similar professional or community involvement backgrounds. Some voters will use the party label as their primary, and perhaps only, piece of information when casting a vote, and some will only vote for candidates from their preferred party.

In school districts where one political party dominates, aligning with the majority viewpoint significantly improves a candidate’s electability.

However, not all districts fit neatly into a single partisan profile. In “purple” districts—characterized by mixed leanings or shifting demographics—declaring a party affiliation may help mobilize one segment of the electorate but may simultaneously limit appeal by alienating another. Candidates must consider whether their

community includes a significant number of crossover voters—individuals willing to support candidates who do not share their party. In these districts, signaling neutrality may offer greater electoral advantage.

Even in areas with strong partisan profiles, many voters prefer nonpartisan leadership for their schools. The presence of party labels may be read, rightly or wrongly, as a red flag for voters who worry that partisan identifiers will polarize board dynamics and shift decision making from practical problem solving to ideological positioning, complicating collaboration and eroding the board’s ability to govern effectively. Candidates who declare a party will want to be prepared to manage the assumptions that voters project onto that label.

Party alignment can open valuable doors to organized support such as volunteer networks, endorsements, established communications channels, donor lists, and increased visibility through party events. These tools can help a candidate reach more voters and run a more effective campaign. However, candidates

must evaluate whether the potential support gained from party affiliation outweighs the additional scrutiny, pressure, and opposition that may follow.

The introduction of the partisan school board ballot carries significant implications. Of course, not every community interprets a party label the same way. In some school districts, a party label reassures voters by signaling shared beliefs; in others, it triggers concerns about injecting partisanship into schools. Some welcome party labels as tools for greater transparency; others fear

they will turn schools into battlegrounds for ideological disputes. Understanding how local voters view political identity in the context of education is essential for candidates weighing whether affiliation will support or undermine their message and overall electability.

► Voters Who Want More Transparency From Candidates

Some voters will appreciate the party identification because they believe these identifiers offer greater transparency about a candidate’s general worldview. Even in a race that is not driven by party platforms, these voters value having cues that help them understand a candidate’s likely values and how the candidate might approach challenging or controversial issues. In lower information

The introduction of the partisan school board ballot carries significant implications. Of course, not every community interprets a party label the same way.

contests—where voters may know little about the individuals running—party affiliation can reduce uncertainty and give voters more confidence in their choices.

They may see the decision to publicly claim a political affiliation as a sign of honesty, that the candidate is willing to be accountable for their perspectives and consistent in their identity. For these transparency oriented voters, the inclusion of a partisan identifier is less about introducing politics into school governance and more about ensuring clarity and straightforward communication from those seeking to serve.

► **Voters Who See Party Labels as Taking a “Side” in Cultural Wars or Education Debates**

Especially in communities that have recently experienced divisive school debates, voters may interpret party labels as shorthand for where a candidate stands in broader cultural or education related conflicts around issues such as curriculum transparency, equity and diversity, library materials, or student support policies, regardless of whether the candidate has taken a firm position on these particular topics.

Because cultural debates can evoke strong emotions, voters may project their own hopes or fears onto candidates based solely on the partisan indicator next to their name. Some may feel reassured, believing the label aligns the candidate with a narrative or philosophy they support. Others may react negatively, assuming the candidate represents an ideological stance they oppose. As a result, the label can shape voter reactions in ways that extend well beyond the traditional scope of school board responsibilities.

► **Voters Motivated by Trust and Personal Reputation**

When voters already know a candidate personally—or recognize them through years of community service or civic participation—the presence of a party affiliation on the ballot may have little influence on their decision. In these cases, voter judgment is shaped less by political identity and more by confidence in the candidate’s commitment to the district’s students and schools. Because the bond between these voters and the candidate is rooted in familiarity and trust, partisan cues may feel secondary or even irrelevant. Some may overlook the label entirely,

For many voters, the introduction of these labels may raise more questions than answers, leading them to seek clarification about what the designation truly portends for the future of their public schools.

relying instead on their personal knowledge of the individual’s integrity, work ethic, and past contributions.

► **Voters Who May Be Confused About What a Party Label Actually Means**

Because party labels are appearing on Indiana school board ballots for the first time, many voters may feel uncertain about what the designation truly signals for their local schools. Unlike offices where party affiliation is long established and deeply connected to legislative platforms, school board roles have traditionally been nonpartisan and operational in nature—centered on budgets, personnel, academic programs, and governance processes. As a result, some community members may be unsure how to interpret a partisan label in this new context.

This uncertainty can lead voters to ask whether a candidate’s party affiliation indicates something more formal than it does. Some may wonder if the political party now exercises influence over the candidate’s decisions, or whether the school board itself will begin functioning the way partisan legislative bodies do. Others may question whether candidates will feel obligated to follow the preferences of party leaders or adopt positions that align with broader political agendas rather than local educational needs. These concerns reflect a broader ambiguity about how much, if at all, a party label changes the nature of school board governance. For many voters, the introduction of these labels may raise more questions than answers, leading them to seek clarification about what the designation truly portends for the future of their public schools.

► **Voters Who Are Motivated to Engage in School Board Races for the First Time**

The introduction of party labels may also draw new voters into school board elections—individuals who previously paid little attention to these races but are now motivated by heightened visibility and clearer political cues. When campaigns become more coordinated through party networks, voters may encounter more messaging, endorsements, and outreach than in past election cycles. This increased exposure can raise awareness about who is running and what the candidates represent, prompting some community

members to engage with school board issues for the first time.

For these voters, the presence of party identifiers can serve as an entry point into a race they might otherwise have overlooked. Political communication—whether through mailers, canvassing, social media, or community events—can signal that the stakes are higher or that the race is connected to broader debates they already care about. As a result, some individuals may feel newly compelled to vote in school board elections, attend meetings, or follow board actions once elected. While these voters may bring fresh energy and engagement to the process, their participation may also shift the overall dynamics of school board elections simply by increasing turnout and expanding the pool of voices involved.

That brings us to the question of how, and to what extent, partisan school board ballots change the dynamics of local school board governance.

POST-ELECTION SCHOOL BOARD DYNAMICS

School boards have historically operated as nonpartisan bodies, but the introduction of political party labels on school board ballots has the potential to reshape how board members relate to one another and how they are perceived by their communities.

When board members are publicly aligned with a political party, they may naturally feel a sense of informal affiliation with colleagues who share that label. This can subtly influence discussions, coalition building, and the way members approach challenging decisions.

Beyond internal relationships, board members may also be perceived—by voters, parents, and community stakeholders—as representatives of broader political ideologies rather than as independent decision makers focused solely on local needs. Whether accurate or not, this perception can shape public expectations about how individual members will vote on specific issues or how they will respond to controversial questions.

Board members may face new pressures, not just from constituents but potentially from party activists or local party officials who expect consistency with the values associated with that label. Even if such expectations are informal or unspoken, the perceived obligation can alter how board members approach their work.

These shifts in identity and perception can have meaningful governance consequences. One possible outcome is the formation of voting blocs, where members aligned with the same party vote together more frequently. While some degree of consensus is typical on school boards, party driven blocs may reduce the

willingness of members to break from group dynamics or support ideas introduced by colleagues from another party. This can, in turn, diminish the incentives for compromise—an essential element in effective governance where diverse perspectives must be balanced.

Over time, this reduced inclination to compromise may make it harder for school boards to stay narrowly focused on educational goals, operational needs, and student outcomes. Discussions that were once primarily grounded in practical considerations—budget constraints, staffing needs, curriculum adoption cycles, building maintenance—may take on an ideological frame, even when the issues themselves do not inherently carry political meaning. This can shift the tone and structure of board deliberations, increasing the likelihood that debates become more symbolic, more polarized, or more connected to external political narratives.

SUPERINTENDENT AND STAFF INTERACTIONS

The introduction of party labels may also complicate the working relationship between the superintendent, staff, and the school board. Administrators may feel the need to navigate ideological differences more carefully, particularly if board members are publicly associated with distinct political identities. Decisions involving curriculum, instructional materials, DEI initiatives, student supports, or school safety may face heightened scrutiny or be questioned through the lens of broader political debates rather than purely educational considerations. As a result, the superintendent’s role as a neutral advisor—focused on evidence, policy, and operational effectiveness—may become more challenging. Board members’ partisan affiliations, even if informal, can shift how recommendations are received and may require administrators to devote additional effort to framing their guidance in ways that maintain trust, clarity, and shared focus on the district’s core educational mission.

BOARD COHESION AND DECISION MAKING

When board members are publicly identified with political parties, reaching consensus may become more challenging, as discussions risk being shaped by ideological boundaries rather than by shared problem solving. Issues that were once routine or operational could take on symbolic weight, leading to longer, more contentious debates and increasing the likelihood that disagreements become tied to broader political narratives rather than the specifics of the district’s needs. In some cases, these dynamics may foster tension or mistrust among board members who hold differing political identities, complicating collaborative

While party identification can amplify visibility and mobilize supporters, it can also polarize races traditionally grounded in local decision making.

governance and making it harder to build the unified leadership that school districts rely upon.

At the same time, the presence of clear partisan labels may, in some districts, make board interactions more predictable and transparent. When members understand one another's general philosophical starting points, they may find it easier to anticipate concerns, identify areas of common ground, or negotiate compromises. In such settings, partisan identities can offer clarity rather than division. Ultimately, the effect on board cohesion and decision making will depend heavily on local culture, the personalities of board members, and the strength of norms that support respectful, education centered governance.

Ultimately, the post-election impact on school board dynamics will vary significantly from one district to another, depending on local culture and

the personalities of board members.

Although party labels provide voters with a convenient reference point, they also invite assumptions that may exceed a candidate's actual positions. For many residents, the label becomes a symbol of larger cultural debates, often disconnected from the day to day responsibilities of school governance.

In this new environment, listing a party has become a strategic decision shaped by community culture, voter expectations, and the evolving role of politics in public education. While party identification can amplify visibility and mobilize supporters, it can also polarize races traditionally grounded in local decision making. Determining which effect will prevail requires a clear understanding of voter behavior, community attitudes, and campaign dynamics. 🗳️



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GRIT

as Stewardship:

Aligning Rigor, Relevance, and Student Choice

By Theresa Hall, College Board, Vice President, Midwest Region, State and District Partnerships



GRIT AS A SYSTEM RESPONSIBILITY

School boards across the Midwest and the nation are navigating an increasingly complex charge. Communities expect schools to

prepare students for postsecondary success while also ensuring graduates are ready to participate in a rapidly evolving workforce. This tension reflects systems adjusting to economic, technological, and societal shifts happening faster than traditional education models were designed to absorb.

In response, state leaders and educators have increasingly sought to identify the essential skills that contribute to student success beyond high school, regardless of pathway. Alongside academic preparation, there has been growing focus on the so-called “soft skills” that enable students to adapt, pivot, and persist in dynamic environments.

One essential soft skill identified as a characteristic of student success is “grit.” In

this context, grit is often framed as individual perseverance. When we talk about grit in students, we often mean persistence, work ethic, and self-discipline in the face of challenge. Those qualities matter deeply. Yet for school systems, grit must mean something more expansive. It looks like the willingness to reflect honestly on what is not working, to adjust course when early efforts fall short, and to remain committed to students even when the path forward is not linear. Institutional grit is not about endurance alone; it is about stewardship.

PERSONAL STORY: CHOICE, FAIRNESS, AND THE ROLE OF THE SAT

That distinction between individual effort and system responsibility became clear to me long before I had language for it. As a senior in high school in Frankfort, Indiana, I was deciding between two excellent options: Butler University and Indiana University. Looking back now, I know I would have been happy and successful at either place. At the time, however, finances were the determining factor. If I wanted to choose Butler, I needed to earn enough scholarship support to make it possible.

I had done the academic work and had a strong high school record. Butler awarded me a quarter-tuition scholarship based on my achievements. I was also selected as a finalist for a scholarship offered through my father's employer, a factory in Lafayette. To ensure fairness across students from many different high schools, every finalist took the SAT on the same day and participated in a structured interview process. That SAT score was a decisive factor in whether I could compete for the scholarship.

I did not fully appreciate it at the time, but the SAT provided something critical. It gave the scholarship committee a common, trusted measure across varied educational contexts. It gave me a fair chance to demonstrate readiness alongside peers from different schools. Ultimately, I earned the scholarship, and that outcome expanded my choices. The SAT was not just a test. It was a system-level tool that enabled access, comparability, and opportunity.

Over more than three decades working in education, I have returned to that experience often. It shaped how I think about rigor, equity, and the responsibility institutions carry when they make decisions that affect student pathways. Relevance fuels engagement, but relevance alone is not enough. It must be paired with rigor, transparency, and systems that work for students across varied contexts.



WHAT EARLY CAREER-CONNECTED EFFORTS TAUGHT US

As interest in career-connected learning accelerated, many early efforts focused on launching programs quickly. While well intentioned, those efforts often underestimated the importance of system-level alignment. Employer partnerships were sometimes transactional rather than durable. Academic rigor and career relevance were treated as parallel tracks rather than integrated experiences. In some cases, growth outpaced clarity, leaving districts with promising initiatives that were difficult to sustain or scale equitably.

These moments were not failures. They were learning points. They revealed that career-connected learning cannot be additive or episodic. It must be designed as part of the core educational experience, grounded in access, quality, and long-term opportunity for students.

Some states and districts are now demonstrating what aligned career-connected systems can look like. In Indiana, for example, deliberate efforts to strengthen work-based learning quality standards and better align credentials with workforce demand are clarifying signals of readiness while preserving postsecondary choice. Across the Midwest, districts are working to ensure that career pathways are integrated sequences tied to rigorous coursework and transparent outcomes rather than isolated programs. These examples reinforce that alignment, not acceleration alone, drives sustainability.

Responding to these lessons required a different kind of grit. It meant slowing down to listen more closely to districts, educators, and employers. It meant shifting from isolated innovation to coherent systems that center student experience and long-term outcomes. It also meant being honest about the tools and signals students need to keep doors open, whether those doors lead to college, career, or both.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

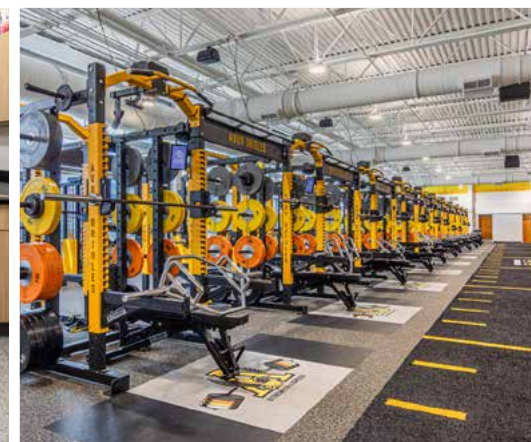
For school boards, these questions fall squarely within governance and stewardship. Boards are uniquely positioned to move beyond approving individual programs and instead ask deeper, system-level questions:



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- Are career-connected pathways held to the same standards of academic rigor as traditional academic routes?
- Do our pathways preserve postsecondary choice, or do they narrow options too early?
- Are signals of readiness clear, trusted, and portable across colleges and employers?
- Are employer partnerships structured for durability beyond individual relationships?
- How are we monitoring quality, access, and equity of outcomes over time?

These questions shift the conversation from program adoption to coherence. They require boards to examine not just whether initiatives exist, but whether they align with long-term student opportunity.

When boards anchor their oversight in these kinds of questions, they model the same reflective discipline they expect

from their systems. Grit at this level is not about pressing forward without reflection. It is about adjusting with intention and recommitting to the responsibility of expanding opportunity.

CALL TO ACTION: ALIGNMENT AS THE NEXT IMPERATIVE

Career-connected learning is not a finished product. It is an evolving approach that demands ongoing reflection, alignment, and shared ownership. The next phase of this work is less about launching new initiatives and more about strengthening coherence across academic expectations, workforce relevance, and long-term sustainability.

When systems embrace grit as stewardship rather than heroics, they resist the temptation to chase momentum without alignment. They instead commit to building durable pathways that expand opportunity while preserving choice. That is the work before us — not simply preparing students to persevere but designing systems worthy of their perseverance. 🌱



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EXEMPLARY
GOVERNANCE
AWARDS



INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

Each Exemplary Governance Award (EGA) level is determined by points a board member earns by attending continuous improvement and professional development activities as described as qualifying electives. Level designations are awarded based upon every board member's accumulation of points during consecutive years of board service ±.

COMMENDABLE: 75* POINTS

This level one award recognizes a member's commendable efforts by demonstrating a desire for advancing the principles of good governance. This individual has worked to attain the first level towards exemplary governance by earning 75 EGA points through participation in training, seminars, and/or conferences.

ADVANCED: 125* POINTS

The second level award reflects a commitment to excellence for those board members who have demonstrated their passion for service and leadership by advancing their professional development education through training opportunities that boost their total EGA points accumulated to 125.

DISTINGUISHED: 175* POINTS

This award recognizes the outstanding achievement of a board member, dedicated to board governance at a distinguished level. Board members earning this level demonstrate a commitment to continuing education and effective board governance.

EXEMPLARY: 225* POINTS

This is the highest level an individual board member can earn. Board members at this level have demonstrated an exemplary commitment to their own professional development in leadership and board governance through their continuous engagement in ISBA's professional development programs. The Exemplary Governance Honor Roll recognizes active school board members who previously attained Level 4 Exemplary distinction by accumulating at least 225 points in the EGA awards program.

± Level awards are determined by the total EGA points accumulated by December 31st of each year. Awards are presented at the board members' respective Spring Regional meeting.

* The points required to advance to each level must include points earned by attending a minimum of one core elective.

BOARD LEVELS

An entire board can qualify for awards in four categories based on the collective Exemplary Governance Award (EGA) status of its individual members and completing certain criteria as a unit. The first three categories are: Commendable, Advanced, and Distinguished. The fourth category represents the highest award offered by ISBA, the Exemplary Governance Award.

COMMENDABLE

Commendable board recognition requires that a majority of a board's members have attained EGA Level One (75 points) or higher. Points earned must include points earned by attending one or more Core meetings.

ADVANCED

Advanced board recognition requires that all board members be at EGA Level One (75 points) or higher. Points earned must include points earned by attending one or more Core meetings. Additionally, the board must complete an annual board self-assessment with ISBA before December 31st of each year.

DISTINGUISHED

Distinguished boards must be second year Advanced Boards. Each member must earn a minimum of 25 additional EGA points per year including points earned by attending one or more Core electives. The board must also show evidence of a board retreat with an outside facilitator (agenda and name of facilitator; minimum of 4 hours) and complete an annual board self-assessment with ISBA.

EXEMPLARY GOVERNANCE AWARD

The Exemplary Governance Award is the highest award a school board can earn. This distinction is earned by validating exemplary board service by showing evidence of leadership and governance effectiveness, student achievement initiatives, continuous improvement, strategic planning, and policy review. Any board earning this award will have clearly demonstrated EGA expectations showing how training and professional development translates into greater governance performance through effective leadership.

Earning the Exemplary Governance Award requires that:

- Each board member must be at EGA Level One (75 points) or higher
- The board must submit an annual performance portfolio by December 31st documenting their adherence, completion and/or validation of the following:
 - Board self-assessment with ISBA
 - Annual board retreat
 - Annual review of corporation goals
 - Evidence of the board's commitment to student achievement
 - Evidence of a board's continuing education and professional development commitment
 - Evidence of an annual superintendent evaluation
 - Adoption of a board compact and/or code of ethics

Board EGA's are determined by boards meeting the required criteria by December 31st of each year. Awards are conferred at the boards' respective Spring Regional Meetings.

2025 BOARD AWARDS

LEVEL 1 COMMENDABLE
Benton Community School Corporation
Bluffton-Harrison, MSD
Boone Township, MSD
Brown County Schools
Carmel Clay Schools
Caston School Corporation
Center Grove Community School Corporation
Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation
Cowan Community School Corporation
Crown Point Community School Corporation
Daleville Community Schools
Decatur County Community Schools
Decatur Township, MSD
DeKalb County Central United School District
DeKalb County Eastern Community School District
Delaware Community School Corporation
Delphi Community School Corporation
Duneland School Corporation
East Allen County Schools
East Chicago, School City
East Porter County School Corporation
Eastern Pulaski Community School Corporation
Edinburgh Community School Corporation
Elkhart Community Schools
Flat Rock-Hawcreek School Corporation
Gary Community School Corporation
Goshen Community Schools
Hamilton Southeastern Schools
Hammond, School City
Hanover Community School Corporation
Hobart, School City
Jennings County Schools
John Glenn School Corporation
Kankakee Valley School Corporation
Lafayette School Corporation
Lawrence Township, MSD
Maconaquah School Corporation
Martinsville, MSD
Middlebury Community Schools
Mississinewa Community School Corporation
Mitchell Community Schools
Monroe County Community School Corporation
Mt. Vernon, MSD
Munster, School Town
New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated School Corporation
New Castle Community School Corporation
North Posey, MSD

North Spencer County School Corporation
Northeast Dubois County School Corporation
Northwest Allen County Schools
Norwell Community Schools
Paoli Community School Corporation
Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation
Peru Community School Corporation
Pike Township, MSD
Pioneer Regional School Corporation
Plainfield Community School Corporation
Portage Township School Corporation
Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corporation
Richmond Community Schools
Rossville Consolidated School District
Shakamak, MSD
Silver Creek School Corporation
South Madison Community School Corporation
South Newton School Corporation
Southwest Allen, MSD
Spencer-Owen Community Schools
Springs Valley Community Schools
Taylor Community School Corporation
Tri-Creek School Corporation
Triton School Corporation
Valparaiso Community Schools
Vigo County School Corporation
Vincennes Community School Corporation
Wa-Nee Community Schools
Warrick County School Corporation
Warsaw Community Schools
West Central School Corporation
West Lafayette Community School Corporation
Westfield-Washington Schools
Yorktown Community Schools
Zionsville Community School Corporation

LEVEL 2 ADVANCED
Barr-Reeve Community Schools
Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Blue River Valley School Corporation
Centerville-Abington Community Schools
Charles A. Beard Memorial School Corporation
Clarksville Community School Corporation
Concord Community Schools
Crawfordsville Community School Corporation
Eastern Howard School Corporation
Elwood Community School Corporation
Fort Wayne Community Schools

2025 BOARD AWARDS

Greater Clark County Schools
Greater Jasper Consolidated Schools
Highland, School Town
Knox Community School Corporation
Lake Central School Corporation
Lake Ridge New Tech Schools
Lake Station Community Schools
Merrillville Community School Corporation
Mishawaka, School City
Monroe Central School Corporation
New Palestine Community Schools
Perry Central Community School Corporation
Plymouth Community School Corporation
River Forest Community School Corporation
South Harrison Community School Corporation
South Putnam Community School Corporation

Tippecanoe School Corporation
Tippecanoe Valley School Corporation
Union Township School Corporation
Wayne Township, MSD

LEVEL 3 DISTINGUISHED
Madison-Grant United School Corporation
Western School Corporation

LEVEL 4 EXEMPLARY
Avon Community School Corporation
Noblesville Schools
North Gibson School Corporation
Speedway, School Town
Warren Township, MSD

2025 INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
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LEVEL 1 COMMENDABLE	
Mike Langford	Avon Community School Corporation
Thomas Glick	Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Nicole Wheeldon	Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Whitney Loyd	Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Chris Dalton	Benton Community School Corporation
Lance Brown	Blue River Valley Schools
Chad Franzman	Boone Township, MSD
Jerry Michalak	Boone Township, MSD
Todd Huff	Bremen Public Schools
Clayton Beard	Brownstown Central Community School Corporation
Kristina Wheeler	Carmel Clay Schools
Jon Shapiro	Carmel Clay Schools
Stacey Brazel	Carroll Consolidated School Corporation
Todd Dooley	Centerville-Abington Community Schools
Bobbi Elliott	Clinton Prairie School Corporation
Tim Koontz	Concord Community Schools
J.D. Uebler	Culver Community Schools Corporation
Elizabeth Lecher Hochstedler	Decatur County Community Schools
Tony Oneal	DeKalb County Central United School District
Katie Pfister	DeKalb County Central United School District
Craig Davis	DeKalb County Eastern Community School District
Valerie Alexander	Delaware Community School Corporation
Pamela Dukes	East Allen County Schools

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
--------------	--------------------

Lynn Rowe	East Gibson School Corporation
Audrey Starr	East Porter County School Corporation
Vanessa Moore	East Porter County School Corporation
Keith Spaulding	East Washington School Corporation
Taylor White	Eastern Pulaski Community School Corporation
Jimmy Terry	Eastern Pulaski Community School Corporation
Carol Swanson	Edinburgh Community School Corporation
Sandra Ratliff	Elwood Community School Corporation
Sasha Henderson	Fayette County School Corporation
Antonette Payne	Fort Wayne Community Schools
Mike Suggs	Gary Community School Corporation
Danita Johnson-Woods	Gary Community School Corporation
Brandon Miller	Goshen Community Schools
Chelsea Crump	Greater Clark County Schools
Tammy Mustain	Greater Clark County Schools
Brian Jones	Greater Clark County Schools
John Rihm	Greenfield-Central Community School Corporation
Meredith Acra	Greensburg Community Schools
Julie Davis	Hamilton Heights School Corporation
Latrica Schooley	Hamilton Southeastern Schools
Kelly Spencer	Hammond, School City
Bradley Keehn	Hobart, School City
Nicole Carey	Indianapolis Public Schools
Angelia Moore	Indianapolis Public Schools
Tiffany Foster	Jac-Cen-Del Community School Corporation

2025 INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
--------------	--------------------

Patrick Sullivan	Jennings County Schools
Christine Carson	John Glenn School Corporation
William Walther	Kankakee Valley School Corporation
Thomas Browne	Knox Community School Corporation
Ebony Barrett	Lafayette School Corporation
Margaret Hass	Lafayette School Corporation
Louise Tallent	Lake Central School Corporation
David Bacon	Lake Ridge New Tech Schools
Jordan Billups-Taylor	Lake Station Community Schools
Mike Poweska	Lake Station Community Schools
Ryan Lind	Lanesville Community School Corporation
Crystal Puckett	Lawrence Township, MSD
Lisa Hutcheson	Lebanon Community School Corporation
Craig Parks	Lebanon Community School Corporation
Rex Betzner	Maconaquah School Corporation
Wendy Longacre	Madison-Grant United School Corporation
Lisa Martin	Madison-Grant United School Corporation
Alan Beck	Marion Community Schools
Michael Gresham	Michigan City Area Schools
Caleb Mast	Middlebury Community Schools
Melisa Branscum	Mill Creek Community School Corporation
Patrick Patterson	Monroe Central School Corporation
April Hennessey	Monroe County Community School Corporation
Brian Williams	Mt. Vernon, MSD
Amanda Wooton	New Palestine Community Schools
Bret Richardson	Noblesville Schools
J. Wylie Sirk II	North Adams Community Schools
Rick Nightingale	North Posey County, MSD
Brittany Giles	North Spencer County School Corporation
Jennifer Rich	North Spencer County School Corporation
Emilee Fleece	North West Hendricks School Corporation
Erica Jamison	Northwest Allen County Schools
Catherine Peterson	Norwell Community Schools
David Padgett	Paoli Community School Corporation
Julie Hopper	Paoli Community School Corporation
Matthew Fuller	Peru Community School Corporation
Meg Guthrie-Pennington	Peru Community School Corporation
Jarrold Ellis	Peru Community School Corporation
Toni Wilson	Pike Township, MSD
Steve Hoofer	Pike Township, MSD
Jud Wolfe	Plainfield Community School Corporation
Lisa Huff	Plymouth Community School Corporation
Steve Holm	Plymouth Community School Corporation
Jeff Smith	Portage Township Schools
Mark Jordan	Rensselaer Central School Corporation
Courtney Wilcox	Rensselaer Central School Corporation

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
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Kym Pickering	Richmond Community Schools
Hector Guzman	River Forest Community School Corporation
Brent Michael	Rossville Consolidated School District
John Banks	Rush County Schools
Melissa Woods	Scott County School District 2
Braionna Barber	Shakamak, MSD
Drexel Turpin	Shoals Community School Corporation
Laurryn McDaniel	Silver Creek School Corporation
Jeanette McCullough	South Bend Community School Corporation
Steve Simler	South Harrison Community School Corporation
Doug Copley	Southwest Allen County, MSD
Detrich Harris	Southwest School Corporation
Deana Stickels	Spencer-Owen Community Schools
Carla Newlin	Springs Valley Community Schools
Brooke Lockett	Triton Central Schools
Kevin Boyer	Triton School Corporation
Erika Watkins	Valparaiso Community Schools
Ashley Kruse	Valparaiso Community Schools
Christina Crist	Vigo County School Corporation
Andrew Skinner	Warrick County School Corporation
Robert McCormick	Washington Community Schools
Cheri O'Day-Marcotte	Wayne Township, MSD
George Lyle IV	West Lafayette Community School Corporation
Brian Gott	Western Boone County Community School Corporation
Cynthia Hurst	Western School Corporation
Gregory Stephens	Western School Corporation
Jonathan Toth	Whiting, School City
Chad Moore	Whitley County Consolidated Schools
Tom Rentschler	Whitley County Consolidated Schools
Jason Brooks	Yorktown Community Schools

LEVEL 2 ADVANCED	
Jennifer Smith	Avon Community School Corporation
Jody Schultheis	Barr-Reeve Community Schools
Jason Major	Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Scott Robertson	Benton Community School Corporation
Darren Burch	Bloomfield School District
Bryce Eaton	Clinton Central School Corporation
Amy Mennen	Clinton Central School Corporation
Vivian Whitaker	Cloverdale Community School Corporation
Tara Towner	Concord Community Schools
Zachary Owen	Delphi Community School Corporation
Beth Mehling	Duneland School Corporation
Kirk Redman	Duneland School Corporation
Beth Wood	East Allen County Schools
Elizabeth McFalls	East Porter County School Corporation

2025 INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
Abbee Summers	Eastern Howard School Corporation
David Bauman	Edinburgh Community School Corporation
Daniel Teter	Edinburgh Community School Corporation
Troy Scott	Elkhart Community Schools
Mike Peterson	Elwood Community School Corporation
Chad Bock	Elwood Community School Corporation
Karen Ragland	Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation
Zac Burnau	Fremont Community Schools
Bradd Weddell	Goshen Community Schools
Ryan Glick	Goshen Community Schools
Jose Elizalde	Goshen Community Schools
Keith Freeman	Greater Clark County Schools
Judy Englert	Greater Jasper Consolidated Schools
Steve Lukemeyer	Greater Jasper Consolidated Schools
Aaron Kuzma	Hanover Community School Corporation
Jason Downs	Knox Community School Corporation
Autumn Ferch	Knox Community School Corporation
Brent Clemenz	Lafayette School Corporation
Julie Peretin	Lafayette School Corporation
Nicole Kelly	Lake Central School Corporation
Kevin Music	Lake Station Community Schools
Jessica Dunn	Lawrence Township, MSD
Robert Krause	Merrillville Community School Corporation
David Weber	Mishawaka, School City
Steve Burton	Mitchell Community Schools
Bradley Inskeep	Monroe Central School Corporation
Ross Grimes	Monroe County Community School Corporation
Kendra Bisesi	Mt. Vernon, MSD
Sandra Schraub	Nettle Creek School Corporation
Jaci Hadsell	New Castle Community School Corporation
Ed Harvey	Nineveh-Hensley-Jackson United School Corporation
Scott King	North Lawrence Community Schools
Nichole Kelley	Pike Township, MSD
Gary Braasch	Rensselaer Central School Corporation
Kristen Brunton	Richmond Community Schools
Myrta Pedroza	River Forest Community School Corporation
Jennifer Craig	Scott County School District 2
Chris Rountree	Silver Creek School Corporation
Steve Hamlett	South Dearborn Community School Corporation
Wade Fanning	South Putnam Community School Corporation
Kimberly Moppert	Southwest Allen County, MSD
Derrek Tennell	Southwestern Consolidated School District
Adam Gonzales	Speedway, School Town
Elizabeth Bixler	Spencer-Owen Community Schools
Dennis Bentzler	Taylor Community School Corporation
Leah Pagone	Union Township School Corporation

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
Christine Kostbade	Union Township School Corporation
Jason Fry	Wabash City Schools
Denny Duncan	Warsaw Community Schools
Melissa Kissling	Warsaw Community Schools
Timothy Hedrick	Washington Community Schools
Joe Hutsell	West Noble School Corporation
Phil Foster	Western Boone County Community School Corporation
Charles Christner	Westview School Corporation
Chris Davenport	Whiting, School City
Victoria Gasaway	Yorktown Community Schools
Katie Aeschliman	Zionsville Community Schools

LEVEL 3 DISTINGUISHED	
Holly Renz	Anderson Community School Corporation
Sarah Parent	Avon Community School Corporation
Rich Stenner	Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Mysia Brown	Blue River Valley Schools
Brian Koontz	Blue River Valley Schools
Kristin Kouka	Carmel Clay Schools
J. Monte Thompson	Crawfordsville Community School Corporation
Amy Pugh	Culver Community Schools Corporation
Jacob Case	Delaware Community School Corporation
Lance Engle	Delaware Community School Corporation
Michael Priest	Delphi Community School Corporation
Gil Smith	Delphi Community School Corporation
Jennifer Blackburn	East Allen County Schools
Patty Jo Gibson-King	East Chicago, School City
Tammy Stunda	Eastern Hancock County, Community School Corporation
Evan Eikenberry	Eastern Howard School Corporation
Stephanie Hoel	Elwood Community School Corporation
Jennifer Matthias	Fort Wayne Community Schools
Noah Smith	Fort Wayne Community Schools
Bob Marcum	Frankfort, Community Schools
Dawn Lang	Hamilton Southeastern Schools
Sarah Parks-Reese	Hamilton Southeastern Schools
Tara Beilke	Hanover Community School Corporation
Katherine Sampson	Kankakee Valley School Corporation
Louise Neese	Lake Ridge New Tech Schools
David Wright	Lake Station Community Schools
Allen Willson	Maconaquah School Corporation
Timothy White	Maconaquah School Corporation
David Whybrew	Madison-Grant United School Corporation
Michael Hensley	Manchester Community Schools
Luke Jackson	Martinsville, MSD
Kate Hummel	Middlebury Community Schools
William Pemberton	Mishawaka, School City

2025 INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
Ingrid Schwarz Wolf	Munster, School Town
Elizabeth Galligan	New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated School Corp
Jon Hooker	New Palestine Community Schools
Terresa Hatke	North Montgomery Community School Corporation
Joseph Kimmel	Paoli Community School Corporation
Dana Sullivan	Penn-Harris-Madison School Corporation
Emily Hartman	Perry Township Schools
Angela Barnes	Pike Township, MSD
Jessica Elston	Plainfield Community School Corporation
Larry DeMoss	Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corp
Jennie Smith	Rochester Community School Corporation
Casi Cowles	Rochester Community School Corporation
Deneen Stewart	South Harrison Community School Corporation
John Lord	South Madison Community School Corporation
Ryan Kindig	South Newton School Corporation
Candace Armstrong	South Newton School Corporation
Joseph Roach	South Putnam Community School Corporation
Joshua Loggins	Tippecanoe School Corporation
Aaron Zolman	Tippecanoe Valley School Corporation
Robert Cochrane	Tipton Community School Corporation
Lori McLaughlin	Union Township School Corporation
Carey LaBella	Vigo County School Corporation
Kevin Humphrey	Warren Township, MSD
Randy Polston	Warsaw Community Schools
Jake Tanner	West Central School Corporation
Mike Steele	Westfield-Washington Schools
Bill Anderson	Westfield-Washington Schools

LEVEL 4 EXEMPLARY	
Dale Nowlin	Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation
Julie Phillips	Baugo Community Schools
Carla Bryant	Blue River Valley Schools
Myra Powell	Borden-Henryville School Corporation
Butch Zike	Clark-Pleasant Community School Corporation
Beth Cherry	Danville Community School Corporation
Todd Mauer	Decatur County Community Schools
Valerie Armstrong	DeKalb County Central United School District
Kirk Schwarzkopf	Delphi Community School Corporation
Alayna Lightfoot Pol	Duneland School Corporation
Steven Screeton	East Allen County Schools
Diane Smith	East Chicago, School City of
Christina McGinnis	East Washington School Corporation
Jordan Buckley	Eastern Howard School Corporation
Kellie Mullins	Elkhart Community Schools
Ann Kirschner	Fayette County School Corporation
Becky Nelson	Franklin Community School Corporation

BOARD MEMBER	SCHOOL CORPORATION
Kevin Kaiser	Franklin County Community School Corporation
Zach Howard	Franklin Township Community School Corporation
Kathy Ruesken	Griffith Public Schools
Suzanne Thomas	Hamilton Southeastern Schools
Tracy Haskell	Hanover Community School Corporation
Sandra Hillan	Hobart, School City of
Ryan Knowlton	John Glenn School Corporation
Amy Norman	Lawrence Township, M.S.D. of
Katti Sneed	Madison-Grant United School Corporation
Matt Hankins	Martinsville, M.S.D. of
Alex Dunlap	Merrillville Community School Corporation
Marty Corley	Michigan City Area Schools
Shannon Walls	Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation
Greg Oeth	Mt. Vernon, M.S.D. of
John Castro	Munster, School Town of
Christi Crosser	Noblesville Schools
Misti Ray	Noblesville Schools
Stephanie Lambert	Noblesville Schools
Brock Sievers	North Gibson School Corporation
Joseph Williams	North Gibson School Corporation
Kristi Schlatter	Northwest Allen County Schools
Jonathan Underwood	Northwestern School Corporation
Chad Kline	Norwell Community Schools
Scott Dubois	Oak Hill United School Corporation
Bill Hoke	Paoli Community School Corporation
Brad Swartzell	Pioneer Regional School Corporation
Danielle Bell	Plainfield Community School Corporation
Lori Wilkie	Portage Township Schools
Nicolas Evans	South Harrison Community School Corporation
Mike Hanna	South Madison Community School Corporation
Lisa Cooper	South Putnam Community School Corporation
Derek Morgan	Spencer-Owen Community Schools
Christopher Burton	Springs Valley Community Schools
Julie Cummings	Tippecanoe School Corporation
Robert Tichy	Union Township School Corporation
Rhonda Hipskind	Wabash City Schools
Jeff Baker	Warrick County School Corporation
Tim Mosbey	Warrick County School Corporation
Karen Burke	Wayne Township, M.S.D. of
Amy Austin	West Lafayette Community School Corporation
Rachel Witt	West Lafayette Community School Corporation
Mary Ann Schaefer	Whitley County Consolidated Schools

8th Annual ISBA STATE HOUSE DAY

The eighth annual ISBA State House Day at the Indianapolis Hyatt Regency Hotel on February 17 offered school board members an in-depth briefing on education bills under consideration this session and an opportunity to meet and connect with top lawmakers. The annual event is part of ISBA's award-winning Legislative Action Network, a program that leverages the unified voices of Indiana school boards to inform, influence, and shape sound education policy. The 2026 session of the Indiana General Assembly concluded on March 14. 🗳️



- A:** (left to right) Steve Corona, Fort Wayne/ISBA President; Rep. Bob Behning, Rep. Ed Delaney, Sen. Jeff Raatz, and Sen. Shelli Yoder
- B:** (left to right) Josh Yoder, Avon; Scott Wyndham, Supt., Avon; Rep. Greg Steuerwald; and Margaret Weilenberg, Plainfield
- C:** ISBA Members and Staff at the State House
- D:** Sen. Rodney Pol; Wilma Vazquez, Portage Township; and Jesse Gomez, East Chicago
- E:** Joe Basham, Silver Creek/ISBA Region 10 Director, and Sen. Gary Byrne
- F:** Steve Corona, Fort Wayne/ISBA President, and Terry Spradlin, ISBA Executive Director
- G:** State House Day briefing at the Hyatt Regency
- H:** Nannett Polk, New Castle, and Sen. Jeff Raatz
- I:** Rep. Sheila Klinker; George Lyle, West Lafayette; Rep. Chris Campbell
- J:** (left to right) Jenise Bohbrink, Brown County; Amy Oliver, Brown County; Whitney Loyd, Columbus; Dale Nowlin, Columbus; and Rep. Ryan Lauer
- K:** (left to right starting with) Sen. Greg Goode; Vivian Whitaker, Cloverdale; Ian Matthews, Shakamak; Braionna Barber, Shakamak; Jacinda Smith, Supt., Shakamak; Cheryl Schopmeyer, Clay; Stacy Killion, Vigo Co./ISBA Region 7 Director

THE INDIANA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION APPRECIATES THE SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION SHOWN BY ITS SERVICE AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS.

For further information regarding Service and Associate Memberships, please contact the ISBA office at (317) 639-0330.

SERVICE MEMBERS

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abonmarche.com

Acrisure
acrisure.com

Administrator Assistance
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AdTec
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Amergis Educational Staffing
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Astra Insurance
astrainsurancegroup.com

Baker Tilly
bakertilly.com

Barnes & Thornburg
btlaw.com

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bartoncoevilamaa.com

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educatorsnowllc.com

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criscommcommunications.com

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Ice Miller LLP
icemiller.com

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ipep.com

JBK Development

KI / Binford Group of Indiana
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krM Architecture
krmarchitecture.com

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Stratelign
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ont.k12.in.us

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Purdue University, College of Education
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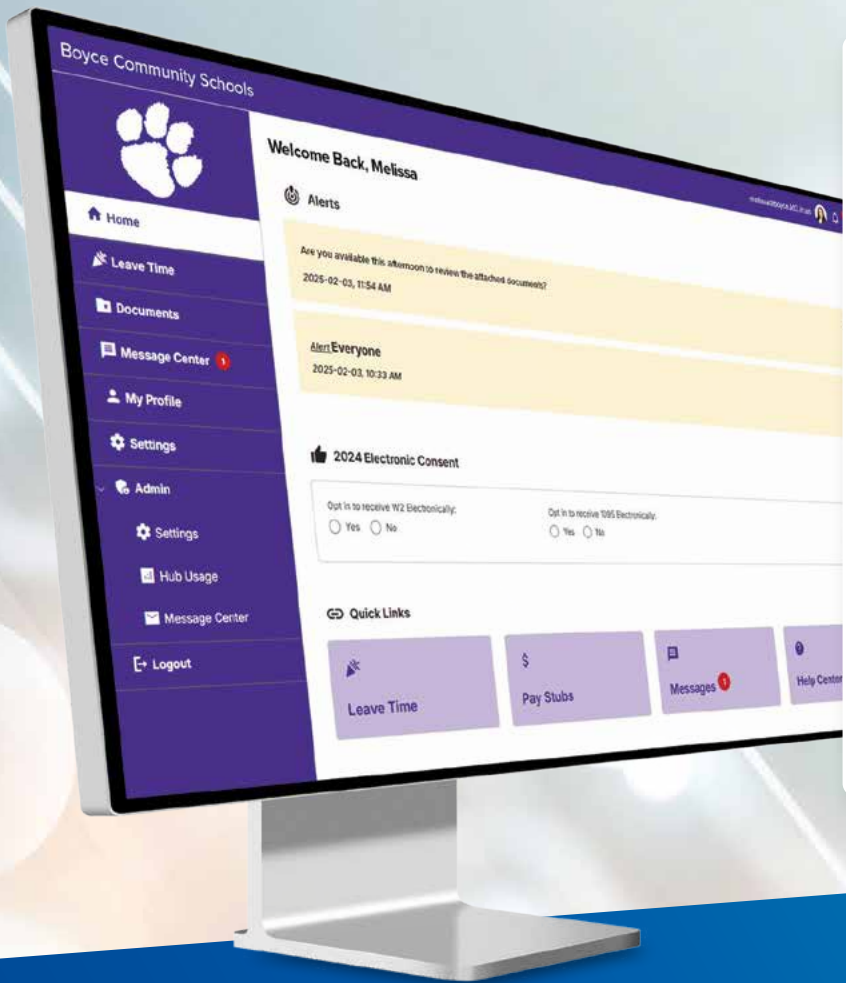
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