

ESSA Community Meetings Findings Summary

Introduction

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) created a draft of Indiana's state plan in response to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a bipartisan law passed by a Republican-majority Congress and signed by a Democratic president. To gather feedback from as many stakeholders as possible, IDOE held community meetings throughout the state.

The community meetings were an integral part of the process, providing a myriad of perspectives and suggestions. Over the course of four months, IDOE hosted 9 community meetings, one in each congressional district. Community meetings were attended by 350+ participants, including teachers, parents, school and district administrators, community leaders, and civil rights advocates.

Community Meeting Structure

The Indiana Department of Education wanted to incorporate the community's voice on three topics: School Accountability, Supporting Students, and School Improvement. The community meetings were conducted with a collaborative structure, directing participants to work in groups and offer suggestions aimed at problem-solving the four key questions. The key questions asked were:

1. How can we determine how our schools are doing?
2. How should we communicate how our schools are doing?
3. How should we support ALL students?
4. How can we improve our schools in need?

Meetings were 90 minutes long with remarks from Dr. Jennifer McCormick, Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Patrick McAlister, Director of Policy. They briefed the audience on ESSA and the state's timeline for creating the plan. During the meetings, participants were asked to select one of the small working groups based on their key question of greatest interest. With assistance from a facilitator, participants considered the key question and offered suggestions for IDOE to consider during the creation of the state plan.

State officials were also on-hand at every meeting to listen to feedback from the small groups. Members of the Indiana State Board of Education (INSBOE) attended at least one meeting each. Staff members from the IDOE and the INSBOE were also present to hear ideas and perspectives.

The working groups spent 30 minutes discussing the topic and creating a list of suggestions. Participants also identified a group reporter who would share their suggestions with other participants. Group reporters presented their group findings for 3-5 minutes. Following the community meetings, IDOE compiled the group presentation feedback for analysis and consideration.

Findings

How can we determine how our schools are doing?

The majority of participants wanted schools to be graded on multiple measures. Academic growth was the most popular among the measures cited, followed by a survey of school culture and climate. Items referenced most frequently are bolded.

Suggested Measures to Use in Accountability Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth measures • Graduation rate • Nationally normed tests to assess academic achievement • Surveys of community, students, parents • Soft skills – social/emotional (rubrics, portfolios, AdvancEd) • School climate and culture survey (and plan of action) • Suspension, chronic absenteeism/attendance, tardiness, discipline referrals • Post-graduation measures including career readiness and work-based learning

How should we communicate how our schools are doing?

Participants also provided insight on the best way IDOE could communicate how schools are doing to the community. Participants suggested improvements on how information is distributed as well as reframing the terms used. Items referenced most frequently are bolded.

Suggested Improvements	Means of Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDOE reframe education language to positives rather than negatives • Focus on school growth and improvement • Involve the community; develop partnerships between schools and community • Bilingual communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dashboards like IDOE Compass • Extended report cards to include school and district • Reports on other regions for comparison • Community involvement • Other systems like mobile applications and social media

How should we support ALL students?

Supporting the socio-emotional needs of students was a frequently cited area of concern. Many attendees felt as though the social and emotional support piece in schools was currently missing from our state and local levels. The primary conclusion reflected teachers and students should have a solid foundation for social and emotional learning. The action items were broken into 3 groups: teachers and staff, school and district, and IDOE. Items referenced frequently are bolded.

School and District	IDOE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use funding for mental health or socio-emotional needs • Reduce outsourcing of students to external programs; keep in the school • Provide wrap-around services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide categorized funding for mental health or socio-emotional needs • Increase access to social and emotional curriculum or resources

Teachers and Staff
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More complete trainings for teachers in mental health • More complete trainings for teachers about different subgroups • More complete trainings for intentional and meaningful use of technology • Identified team of support: social workers, counselors, psychologists, nurses • Peer-to-peer observations/feedback • Encourage teachers to build meaningful relationships with students

Supporting students through involvement of parents and families was identified as a critically important need. Better support for families could include making data available regarding transition periods (pre-K to kindergarten, elementary to secondary, middle to high school, high school to post-graduation) readily available for parents. It was also suggested the IDOE increase parent trainings and resources for student-centered academic and career supports.

How can we improve our schools in need?

Suggestions for improving schools in need fell neatly into four categories of responsibilities: IDOE, Local Education Agencies (LEA), teachers, and parents/communities. The most effective way to implement these interventions was either by or through these agencies. Items referenced most frequently are bolded.

IDOE	Schools and Districts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a “pause” in accountability to allow schools to implement changes • Fluid supports based on needs of buildings (and LEAs) • Increase supports in early childhood education • More complex rubric for school success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide wrap-around services • Reduce class size • Extend school day/year; alternate vacation schedule • Hiring Latinx, Spanish-speaking staff so students have role models that look like them
Teachers	Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bring back ½ days of professional development ○ Use train-the-trainers model • Instruction Coaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased morale through increased pay and sense of being valued ○ Increase teacher retention • Use tiered evaluation system for new teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship established between districts and community • Literacy and English classes offered to parents

The desire for additional funding was the most popular suggestion from the community meetings. There were significant differences in how participants believed the money should be used. Below are some of the suggestions for use of additional funding to support schools in need. No one answer was referenced more than another and thus none are bolded.

- Preschool
- Funding toward meals, social skills, school counseling, parent education
- Extra funding assistance for subject-based interventions and support
- Evaluate funding formulas; provide an individualized formula that takes various factors into consideration; such as, students' socioeconomic status and specific services based on needs
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Other Promising Practices

These community meetings not only allowed IDOE to hear what participants wanted to see in the ESSA plan but also what changes they would like to see in education overall. The majority of their suggestions fell into 5 groups.

Preschool	College and Career Readiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschool for all, ages 3 years to 3rd grade • Bridging gap between early childhood and elementary education • Support for families with students transitioning from preschool to elementary • Tracking student performance from preschool • Increased funding in early childhood education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measuring students' enrollment in dual credit classes • Measuring career readiness • Training educators of gifted students • Career and technology education supports for all students • Identifying ELL students for gifted or advanced placement classes
Literacy	STEM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts building relationships with parents through literacy and English classes • Additional funding assistance for subject-based interventions and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awarding points for STEM educators • Supporting students with technology • Equitable access and funding for technology • Training for intentional/meaningful use of technology
Career and Technical Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measuring post-graduation enrollment in work-based learning • Measuring Career and Technical Education course enrollment • Measuring workplace certification offered in schools 	