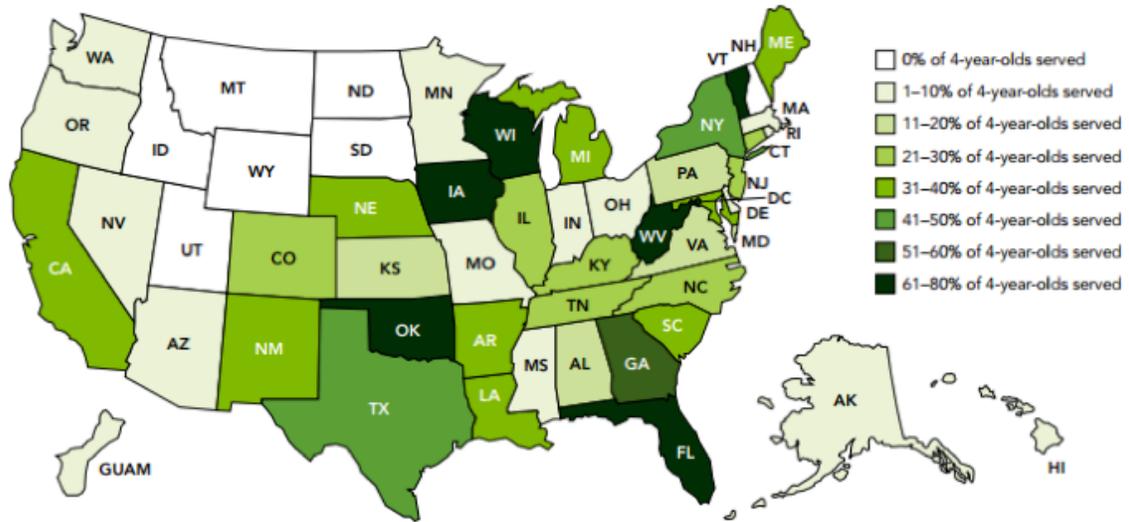




# Our Kids

## PRESCHOOL OPPORTUNITIES AND MANDATORY KINDERGARTEN

Approximately two-thirds of preschool age children in Indiana are not enrolled in a preschool program. Indiana can and must do better to provide its children a solid start.



*The National Institute for Early Education Research, 2016*

Funding for Indiana’s On My Way Pre-K program increased to \$22 million in 2016 – 17 and expanded into five counties, bringing the total counties served to 20, which is only 24 percent of the counties in the state. All young kids should have the same opportunities to start school prepared.

Like preschool, kindergarten lays the foundation for a child’s success. Kindergarten is where kids learn the basics: math, language arts, music, art, physical education and more. Kindergarten educators also teach and reinforce critical social skills such as sharing, patience, courtesy, citizenship, responsibility and punctuality to name a few.

Today, kindergarten is more rigorous than it was decades ago meaning those who miss out, will start school behind their peers. Currently, the state does not require students to be enrolled in school earlier than age seven. Thirty-four states and D.C. have compulsory school attendance ages of five or six. We recommend Hoosier kids begin at age five.



However, not all children may be ready to enter kindergarten at age five, so policymakers should enable parents to opt-out of requirement for one year.

**Solutions:**

- Recognize the true value of preschool education and provide the funding support so local community public schools can provide quality programs.
- Require students to attend kindergarten.
- Lower Indiana’s compulsory school attendance age from 7 to 5 – allow parents a one-year grace period.

**REDUCE CLASS SIZES**

Create a learning environment with class sizes that enable teachers to connect one-on-one with each student. Class size and student-teacher ratios impact student performance. Indiana has lost ground on quality student-to-teacher interaction and attention.

**Solution:**

- Conduct a statewide audit of class sizes in Indiana public schools.

**STOP OVER-TESTING  
STUDENTS AND MISUSING SCORES**

The overemphasis on standardized tests and the amount of classroom time allocated to the wide array of assessments is detrimental to student learning. Over-testing depletes valuable instructional hours. Test anxiety among students has increased due to the weight put on these assessments.

Too much testing also negatively impacts the teaching profession. Teachers feel greater pressure from testing and accountability policies, particularly in low-performing schools. The pressures compounded by A – F grades and linking student test scores and teacher evaluations (compensation) can increase teacher attrition. The stigma that results from labeling schools can drive out current teachers and deter others from seeking employment at struggling schools.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides flexibility for states to reduce testing time, but ILEARN, the test to replace ISTEP, is in many ways another version of ISTEP. Further work is required as ESSA undergoes implementation to reduce testing time.



### **Solutions:**

- Hold school districts harmless during the transition to new standards and assessments.
- Provide greater balance between student instructional time and testing.
- Provide greater local flexibility in development and implementation of student assessments.
- Increase the use of student alternative assessments, such as formative tests instead of ISTEP/ILEARN.

## **AMENDING THE INDIANA DIPLOMA/GRADUATION PATHWAYS**

Changes under ESSA now require calculation of state graduation rate averages based on the diploma received by a majority of students, which in Indiana is the Core 40 diploma. This means the General Diploma – a diploma option currently offered mostly to students with learning challenges – could no longer count toward graduation rates in the state report to the U.S. Department of Education. The result will likely be a significant reduction in graduation rates reported in Indiana, as well as an artificial spike in D and F schools following the transition.

Currently, all schools must offer the General Diploma as an option. Most employers in the state require a diploma, but most also accept the General Diploma.

Additionally, Indiana does not currently offer an alternative diploma, which would only be applicable to the most severe categories of learning disability. The State Board of Education was tasked with establishing graduation pathways as required by 2017 legislation and the new ILEARN system, in addition to industry certification, Advanced Placement and military careers to name a few.

Altering recognized diplomas offered by the state, however, may require a legislative fix.

### **Solutions:**

- Every Hoosier student matters, and their successes should be counted as they always have.
- Indiana students, educators and schools should not be penalized based on semantics and titles. The General Diploma, along with the state's other diplomas, meets standards that have been long-accepted.
- Don't put Indiana at an artificial disadvantage when compared with other states.



## TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Students' life experiences not only impact their behavior and their ability to learn, but impact their long-term health and life expectancy. If untreated, trauma can account for a 20-year reduction in one's life expectancy. As the number of traumatic events experienced during childhood increases, the risk for the following health problems in adulthood increases depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide attempts, heart and liver diseases, pregnancy problems, high stress, uncontrollable anger and family, financial and job problems.

- Young children exposed to five or more significant adverse experiences in the first three years of childhood face a 76 percent likelihood of having one or more delays in their language, emotional or brain development.
- A child's reactions to trauma can interfere considerably with learning and/or behavior at school.
- Sixty percent of adults report experiencing abuse or other difficult family circumstances during childhood.
- Twenty-six percent of the children in the U.S. will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four years old.

Trauma informed care changes the way schools provide services for students. The question becomes, "What has happened to this child?", instead of, "What is wrong with this child?" A student's school can serve as a critical system of support for a child who has experienced trauma.

Administrators, teachers and staff can help reduce the impact of trauma on children by recognizing trauma responses, accommodating and responding to traumatized students within the classroom setting and referring children to outside professionals when necessary.

### **Solutions:**

- Assessment of mental health services available in schools and communities across the state.
- Fund an increased collection of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores for adults.
- Study districts that have implemented a trauma informed care approach and have worked with community partners to provide systems of care.
- Create a safe and supportive schools program.



## DUAL CREDIT

In December 2016, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the regional accrediting body for Indiana's colleges and universities, issued a five-year extension for Indiana's dual credit teachers to meet new academic requirements. Specifically, the new requirements called for not just a master's degree, but a master's degree plus 18 graduate credit hours in the subject area they teach.

For context, approximately 71 percent of Indiana's dual credit teachers, teaching more than 45,000 students, wouldn't meet the new requirements. Some universities are attempting to assist by offering free tuition for completion of required coursework.

### **Solution:**

- Ensure that those who teach dual credit remain accredited without being personally financially responsible.



# Our Schools

## KEEP COMMITMENT TO FUNDING SCHOOLS

In the fall of 2017, schools learned that the legislature’s school budget was short approximately \$9.3 million, due to an increase in enrollment at traditional public schools.

Although, this amount is a small percentage of Indiana’s entire school funding, every dollar matters in our state’s cash-strapped schools. Our kids deserve the commitment from our state to receive the funding they were promised – not funding cuts in the middle of the school year.

### Solution:

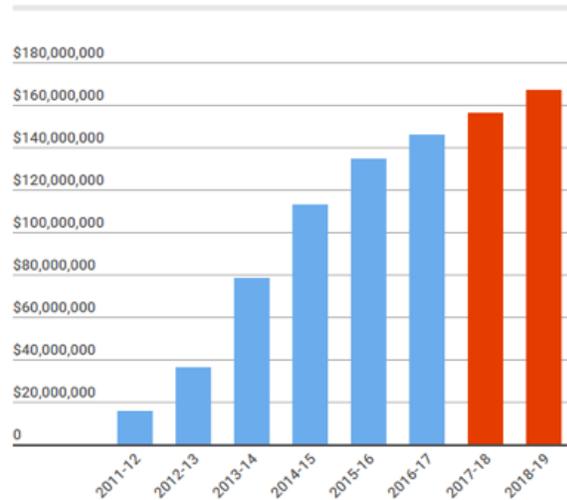
- Appropriate additional school funding so that no school experiences reductions.

## THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF VOUCHERS

As Indiana continues to divert funds from community public schools to support its controversial private school voucher program, there is greater research showing the program does not improve student learning.

The growing financial cost of Indiana’s private school voucher program is impacting local school districts directly. Private and parochial schools, with this new infusion of taxpayer support, are expanding grade levels – creating a need for more funding.

Yearly Voucher Costs



Since vouchers were funded at 90 percent of public school funding and the law initially required students to attend a public school for at least a year, they were marketed as a taxpayer savings with a promise to school districts that they would share in that savings through a rebate. However, the savings theory only works when the state has already counted the student.

The total amount of vouchers awarded has also grown exponentially as caps were removed. Initially, \$15 million was awarded to 3,900 students. This has now grown to \$156 million in 2018 and another increase to \$167 million in 2019.

In 2016 – 17, failing private voucher schools received more than \$23 million. Four thousand students were enrolled in these failing schools.

### **Solutions:**

- As a matter of public interest and greater transparency, separate voucher school funding from community-based school funding.
- Require the same financial reporting standards for private voucher schools as expected of public schools.
- Require private voucher schools to comply with the same anti-discrimination laws as public schools and revoke certification if schools have admissions policy that violate these protections.

## **PRIVATE SCHOOL TAX CREDIT**

Beginning with the 2010 taxable year, Indiana established a state income tax credit to enable taxpayers to make contributions to scholarship granting organizations (SGOs) and receive a direct credit against the taxpayer's state income tax liability. The tax credit equals 50 percent of the taxpayer's contribution to the SGO.

In 2017, the General Assembly increased the private school voucher tax credit from its current \$9.5 million per year to \$12.5 million in 2018 and then again to \$14 million in 2019.

There are no limits on how much a single taxpayer can contribute. The only limit is the 50 percent credit amount and the state's overall, annual cap.

This credit has become a windfall to some of Indiana's most affluent taxpayers – enabling them to choose whether to pay taxes that benefit the public good or give to an SGO to fund private school tuition. More than 81 percent of the credits that had been granted since 2010 have been to taxpayers making more than \$200,000 in adjusted gross income and 62.2 percent were given to taxpayers making more than \$500,000 in adjusted gross income.

### **Solution:**

- Repeal the state's income tax credits granted to individuals who, instead of paying taxes, can divert those funds to organizations that fund private school tuition scholarships. Indiana cannot afford these unnecessary tax giveaways and a repeal potentially keeps the state from losing up to \$14 million in revenue each year.



## CHARTER SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY & TRANSPARENCY

Charters have become an industry with rapid expansion and increased funding. Charter schools in Indiana grew from just 11 in 2002 to 95 in 2016 – 17. More than 44,000 students are enrolled in Indiana charter schools, representing a 7 percent growth in one year.

Lawmakers allocated more than \$23 million in 2018 – 19, a 4.2 percent increase. New charter schools starting in 2019 have been allocated \$11.6 million bringing the total investment in new charter schools to \$35 million. Additionally, Innovative Network Schools will receive \$15 million each over the next two years.

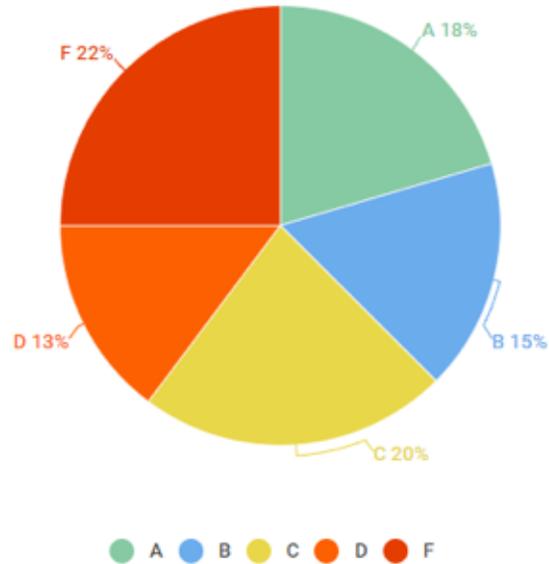
U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has awarded Indiana \$60 million to expand charter schools in Indiana over the next five years – with \$24 million guaranteed in the first year.

Proper use and management of public tax dollars by charter schools remains a large issue nationally. In a study, the Center for Popular Democracy concluded that taxpayers in 15 states lost \$215 million in charter school fraud, financial mismanagement, waste and abuse in 2016 alone. More transparency and safeguards for Indiana charter schools are needed.

Indiana’s charter schools continue to underperform and underserve our kids. In 2017, sixty-two percent of traditional public schools received a grade of A or B, while just 32 percent of charter schools received an A or B. This has been a trend every year.

With millions of dollars pouring into charters each year, these schools must be held accountable to taxpayers for performance, as well as, safeguarding dollars that are now diverted away from community-based schools.

## 2017 Charter School Grades





### **Solutions:**

- Create a charter school market assessment board to oversee the number, along with the viability and need of establishing new charter schools.
- Call for no less than 50 percent of a charter's public meetings take place in the residential zone in which the school is located.
- Require at least a minimum of two board members reside within the school zone rather than out-of-state entity representation alone.
- Establish annual audits and financial reports posted annually to the public via the school's website.
- Require the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) to approve and monitor a plan to prevent financial and enrollment fraud, waste and abuse.
- Address balance and fairness in admissions by requiring charter schools to provide equal access and not be allowed to selectively admit and expel students.
- Require that all charter teachers possess a license.
- Ensure school employees and staff can organize and collectively bargain without interference by, or discouragement from, the administration or governing body.
- Prohibit charter organizers from opening new charters or expanding current ones until a track record of performance is available.

## **VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS**

The track record of virtual schools in Indiana has been wholly unimpressive for kids and taxpayers.

This year, all but one virtual school received an F. The exception received a D. Hoosier Academy Virtual Charter School has received an F grade since 2010, with the long-failing school eligible for closure in 2015. Since charter schools do not come under traditional public-school accountability laws, closure has been what charter school supporters refer to as their accountability.

Despite its record, Hoosier Academy has been budgeted nearly \$40 million over the next two years.

Another of Indiana's failing virtual charter schools, Indiana Virtual School, was found to have hired barely any teachers, one for every 222 students. All the while the school founder's company made millions of dollars.

Indiana Virtual School will receive nearly \$63 million over the next two years, based on the budget passed by the legislature.



Indiana's virtual schools have grown tremendously since their creation in 2009. Currently, more than 12,000 students are enrolled in virtual schools. More must be done to hold virtual charter schools accountable for their student outcomes, prevent further generations of students from being left behind and protect taxpayer investments.

**Solutions:**

- Place a moratorium on any new or expanded virtual schools.
- Study whether virtual schools should be further expanded.
- Change the funding formula for virtual schools, so that funding is tied to student academic progress rather than when they enroll or log in.

**PAUSE ACCOUNTABILITY**

The General Assembly passed HEA 1003 in 2017, which replaces ISTEP with a new statewide assessment system called ILEARN. ILEARN marks a shift away from the criterion-referenced ISTEP to a norm-referenced model that will better measure student's individual ability and growth through a computer-adaptive format.

However, as has been the case in other states, transitioning from new standards to new tests takes time.

**Solution:**

- While Indiana continues to undergo the transition to new state standards and the ILEARN assessment system, lawmakers should suspend invoking any accountability consequences for schools, districts and communities, as well as the link between high-stakes test scores and teacher evaluations.

**COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

Collective bargaining has a very long and rich tradition that directly impacts student learning. Bargaining helps ensure that qualified, licensed teachers are in every classroom. Bargaining incentivizes teachers to stay in classrooms for a career rather than leaving for alternative opportunities. Yet, legislation continues to attempt to strip those incentives away. Efforts to erode organizing and bargaining worsen the teacher shortage problem.

The right to bargain working conditions was required under law prior to sweeping reforms in 2011, which restricted bargaining to salary and employee benefits. In 2015, the General Assembly further narrowed salary and benefits bargaining to specifically prohibit the bargaining of performance pay and master's degree attainment.

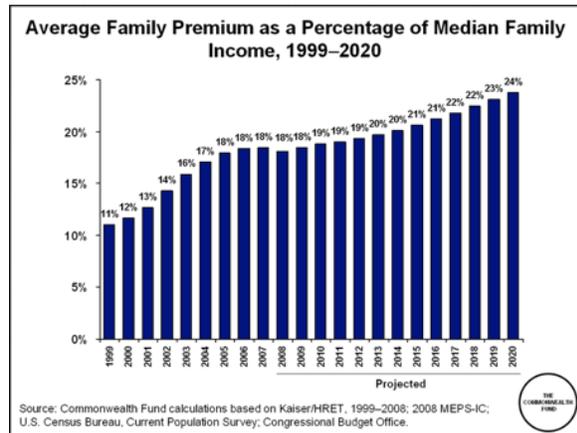


**Solutions:**

- Clarify for the Indiana Education Employment Relations Board that bargaining salary and wages is not limited to equal increments or percentages.
- Restore collective bargaining for the issue of hours worked.
- Prohibit school districts that have excessive cash balances and rainy-day funds from claiming “deficit financing” during bargaining.
- Uncouple teacher evaluation decisions from salary calculations, at least until student test implementation and results are considered solid.
- Restore student learning/working conditions and the school calendar as mandatory subjects of discussion.

**BALANCE OUT-OF-POCKET EXPENSES**

School employees continue to face premium increases to their health insurance plans as providers raise costs. Some corporations have seen a more than 40 percent increase in one year to maintain the same amount of coverage. School corporations shift some of this burden to employees as new contracts are negotiated. Combined with sluggish rising wages educators are feeling the pinch.



**Solutions:**

- Increase the cap on what school districts can pay for employee health care from the 112 percent of the costs for the state employee plan to 120 percent.
- Restrict counting an employee’s Health Savings Account toward the cap.
- Count only the teachers for purposes of the 112 percent cap.

**PROHIBITION OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS**

In 2013, the General Assembly passed a bill blatantly targeting public school teachers and singling them out for their political activities. The omnibus election bill included a provision that prohibits government employees, including school employees, from political activity.



Specifically, this bill makes it a Class A misdemeanor for a government employee to knowingly or intentionally use the property of the employee's government employer to do any of the following:

- Solicit a contribution.
- Advocate the election or defeat of a candidate.
- Advocate the approval or defeat of a public question.

Additionally, the government employee may not knowingly or intentionally distribute campaign materials advocating the election or defeat of a candidate or the approval or defeat of a public question on the government employer's real property during regular working hours.

The offense is bumped up to a Class D felony if the employee had a prior conviction under this law.

The parts of the bill that deal with school property and school employees solely target public school employees while school employees in private voucher schools – which accept Hoosier taxpayer dollars – are exempt from these criminal sanctions.

**Solution:**

- Impose the same criminal exposure generated from political activity using employer property for private school employees who work in taxpayer-funded private voucher schools as existing public school and state government employees.



# Our Future

## **ELIMINATE HIGH-STAKES CONSEQUENCES ON TEACHER EVALUATIONS**

Pressures linked to student standardized testing create unreasonable workloads for teachers and serve as disincentives to take assignments in hard-to-staff schools.

Attrition is higher in schools facing A – F pressure. This worsens the teacher shortage dilemma, because low-performing schools continue the revolving door where effective teachers choose to leave for a better environment elsewhere.

An ISTA survey found that 46 percent of ISTA member teacher respondents considered quitting because of their evaluation system. More than 10 percent said evaluations make them want to transfer schools or districts. More than 55 percent of members indicated that evaluations significantly impact career decisions. It is difficult to keep the best and brightest and recruit new professionals if the evaluation is perceived as unfair.

Reducing the frequency of evaluations for highly-effective and effective teachers will enable administrators to devote more time to helping develop and improve the performance of struggling teachers.

ESSA allows states flexibility to decouple standardized student test scores from performance evaluations, among other things such as abolishing punitive A – F school grades and reducing testing time. However, the legislature did not take advantage of this flexibility in 2017 and (for now) maintains the existing teacher evaluation system.

### **Solutions:**

- Place a moratorium on using student data for high-stakes consequences linked to teacher evaluations during the transition to the new ILEARN assessment system.
- Maintain local control in the development and implementation of teacher performance evaluation models.
- Prohibit state-driven, mandated percentages that significantly inform evaluations.
- Provide training for both evaluators and teachers regarding the evaluation process, criteria and expectations.
- Reduce the frequency of evaluations for teachers rated highly-effective and effective from every year to every three years.
- Provide teacher input in the development of local plans, as well as a strong feedback loop throughout the evaluation process.
- Any state audit of teacher evaluation systems (as proposed to the State Board of Education) should include teacher input and perspectives, in addition to data on student percentages.



## **RE-ESTABLISH THE INDIANA PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BOARD**

One common characteristic of a profession is a body of practitioners who oversee the creation of standards, enforcement of standards and the administration of licenses (initial awarding, renewals and revocations). Lawyers have their respective bar associations. Physicians and nurses have licensing boards. Indiana had a practitioner-led professional standards board for more than 20 years.

### **Solution:**

- Re-establish an Indiana Professional Standards Board as an independent, autonomous body that governs teacher training and licensure. Ensure there is a broad-based representation of practitioners.

## **RECRUIT THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST TEACHERS**

Attracting and retaining qualified educators is vital to ensuring Indiana's students are taught by highly-qualified teachers in every classroom. The quality of our educator workforce has a direct impact on student learning and long-term effects on the state's economic well-being. Students need the latest skills and knowledge to compete in an increasingly global economy. Teacher quality plays a major role in providing educational and career opportunities to all Hoosier students, and is the single most important school-related factor impacting student learning.

### **Solutions:**

- Create and fund a program within the IDOE that provides incentives and supports to school districts to develop additional programs in high schools, beyond the cadet teaching program to draw future educators into the profession.
- Create a working, state-funded loan-forgiveness program that exchanges student loan forgiveness for service. Ensure this program not only includes loan forgiveness opportunities for teacher candidates, but also extends to existing teachers who are paying student loans.
- Expand induction and mentoring programs and fund the scaling-up of programs statewide.

## **IMPROVE FAIRNESS OF TEACHER CORE LICENSING EXAMS**

New university graduates hoping to enter the teaching profession have had abnormal difficulties passing certain licensing exams that have prevented top students from getting teaching jobs. A single test is prohibiting well-qualified applicants from obtaining a license.



Statewide, 84 percent of districts report a teacher shortage in multiple content areas. The number of teacher licenses issued by IDOE has also fallen by 35 percent.

Some exams like the middle school science exam, only have an 18 percent passage rate. More than half of the content area licensing exams have passage rates below 80 percent. In 2015 – 16, only 36 percent of test-takers passed the English CORE middle school exam, 32 percent passed the CORE middle school math test and 18 percent passed middle school CORE science test.

Otherwise highly qualified candidates are being blocked from their profession in curious numbers. Testing companies have not provided any good explanation for these anomalies.

### **Solutions:**

- Conduct a validity study for CORE exams to determine why so many well-qualified graduates are failing.
- Provide adequate testing time for all CORE licensing exams.
- Create more user-friendly and easily understood instructions and online tools such as calculators and white board space for math problems.
- Reassess exam cut scores to determine whether adjustments are needed to reliably increase passage rates.
- Create a special avenue for highly qualified applicants who are being curiously stymied by these content tests.

## **DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE OF SUPPORT STAFF**

Nowhere does the rubber meet the road with student needs more than through the work of educational support professionals (ESPs). Within ISTA, ESPs include school bus drivers, food service staff, instructional aides, building maintenance and school office personnel.

Many of these employees work non-traditional hours, fewer hours (too-often without adequate insurance benefits) and are required to adjust at a moment's notice. They impact the learning environment for students in important ways—health, safety, nutrition and learning.

The prerequisites for their continued employment include additional trainings, enhanced background checks and regular health monitoring.



They are suffering from shortages across the state alongside teachers—both in terms of their numbers and in terms of their compensation and benefits.

It is past time for the General Assembly to reconsider the central work of ESPs in our public schools and to rightly view their needs as student needs.

### **Solutions:**

- Create an ESP training fund to support local school district efforts in keeping their ESPs up-to-date professionally. The training fund will support at least the following types of professional learning:
  - driver trainings
  - latest nutritional studies
  - technology
  - building security
  - serving special needs students
  - anti-bullying
  - student discipline
- Establish ESP collective bargaining rights and due process protections, including enforceable timelines on grievances.
- Remove the fees for expanded criminal history checks imposed on existing ESP employees.
- Reduce the expected lifespan of school buses from 12 to 10 years.

## **STRENGTHEN PENSION & RETIREMENT BENEFITS**

When policymakers ensure a pension for public employees, including teachers, they are making a statement to those employees that they are important, their work is valued and they are worth the investment.

By all accounts, the Indiana Public Retirement System (INPRS) is in good shape and is used as an example nationally of how to run a public pension plan. The plan is well-funded and considered fiscally sound by experts.

INPRS has indicated that Indiana has the lowest burden per household to fully fund public pensions in the country. Indiana also has the second lowest combined pension and long-term debt liability in the U.S. as a percentage of its gross domestic product.

Indiana's public retirement system is not broken and there is no looming danger to the state or taxpayers.



Efforts to transition Indiana's current hybrid defined benefit (DB)/annuity retirement benefit for teachers to a 401(k)-style defined contribution (DC) plan are misguided and will exacerbate, not solve, Indiana's teacher shortage. Indiana's new DC-only plan for teachers will not benefit individuals who make teaching their lifelong career.

**Solutions:**

- Focus on providing a true cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for retirees, rather than a 13th check.
- A COLA reserve fund should provide a guaranteed COLA when the threshold is reached rather than continuing to delay a COLA by providing year-by-year 13th check stipends, thus depleting the COLA reserve.
- Provide a catch-up provision to help elevate pension benefits of those who have been in retirement for a long time to improve purchasing power for retirees.
- Ensure that Indiana's plan remains a hybrid DB/DC plan rather than moving to a DC plan, which would lower benefits to retirees.
- Maintain DB plans for new teachers as an incentive to remain in the profession rather than exacerbating the teacher shortage problem by worsening retirement benefits.
- Provide a three-year window for new hires who elect the DC plan upon employment to transfer back to the DB plan if an individual member of TRF wants to change his or her plan.
- Provide a partial state payment for retiree health insurance through a transition to Medicare.