



Indiana State Teachers Association

2024 Legislative Priorities



RESTORE AND EXPAND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND MANDATORY DISCUSSION

Empower teachers to influence and determine class sizes/caseloads, promoting a more personalized and effective learning environment.

Enable teachers to offer substantial input on textbook selection, teaching methods and the availability of essential student supports. Teachers must have the freedom to teach accurate, age-appropriate lessons about America, from our greatest triumphs to our darkest moments.

Grant teachers the ability to negotiate their working hours, emphasizing the importance of valuable prep time for effective lesson planning and timely feedback.

Restoring Teacher Voice Through Discussion Rights or Collective Bargaining

Until the passage of SEA486, teachers had a 50-year right to discuss topics covering student learning conditions. This process worked and it gave teachers a voice in their profession to guarantee that the school employer and the exclusive representative discuss, provide meaningful input and exchange points of view with respect to at least the following items:

1. Curriculum development and revision
2. Selection of curricular materials
3. Teaching methods
4. Hiring, evaluation, evaluation plans, reports on the evaluation plans, the use of adjunct teachers permitted under IC 20-28-5-27, promotion, demotion, transfer, assignment and retention of certificated employees
5. Student discipline
6. Expulsion or supervision of students

7. Pupil/teacher ratio
8. Class size or budget appropriations
9. Safety issues for students and employees in the workplace
10. Hours
11. Funding for a plan for a remediation
12. Nonbargainable items under IC 20-43-10-3.5:
 - *Teacher appreciation grants*
 - *Individual teacher appreciation grant stipends to teachers*
 - *Additions to base salary based on teacher appreciation grant stipends*
13. Supplements provided under IC 20-28-9-1.5

The discussion process fostered labor/management mutual respect between the parties while maintaining labor/management peace — ultimately creating better learning conditions for our students.

Restoration of Teacher Collective Bargaining Rights

Teachers have high levels of work stress, as well as mental health issues, due to work environment factors such as student disciplinary problems, classroom management and the constantly changing requirements and laws imposed upon them. Work stress increases teacher attrition, and it also can negatively impact classroom performance which in turn affects student learning. Stress and stress-related illnesses are worsening the teacher shortage in Indiana.

Research conducted by the Economic Policy Institute shows that states with strong teachers' unions and collective bargaining agreements across districts have lower stress levels than states with weak unions and lower union density.



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The study looks at anti-union laws in key states, including Indiana, to examine how institutional changes through these laws have impacted teachers. The findings indicate a clear negative effect of anti-union laws on stress levels, and interestingly STEM teachers in particular are especially affected.

The study also found that union ability to increase teacher pay and improve working conditions were major factors influencing teacher stress levels. Other factors include providing a collective voice for teachers, providing advocacy, better work climate and stronger leadership capacity. Overall, these factors reduce teacher turnover and improve teacher morale in states where unions play a larger role in teacher well-being.¹

Teachers Unions and Student Learning

Several recent studies show the positive impact of strong teachers' unions on improved student learning due to more money going directly into classrooms, thus positively affecting student learning including increased test scores, as well as attracting more candidates into the teaching profession in states with stronger unions.

In states with strong teachers' unions, more dollars were channeled directly into school classrooms, whereas in weaker states any additional dollars tended to focus on lowering property taxes.² Teachers' unions significantly improve professional growth opportunities and address teachers' professional needs that can lead to higher student learning levels.³ Research by the Sociological Forum also suggests a positive relationship between teachers' unions and student learning increases due to contract negotiation factors and working conditions

or professional factors.⁴ Research using data from unionized charter schools in California found that unions have the most positive impact on student math scores.⁵ Additionally, a national study found that teachers' unions increase student test scores, particularly for Black students.⁶

A study by the Center for American Progress indicates that relationships and partnerships between school administrators and educators have a direct positive influence on student learning, despite school type and poverty level. Union partnerships also lead to greater quality of communication and feedback between educators, which provides a venue for collaboration regarding student learning strategies. These communication opportunities are a strong predictor of significant gains for student learning.⁷

¹ Han, Eunice (August 29, 2022) Economic Policy Institute, "[Teachers' unions reduce teacher stress. Anti-union laws significantly increase it.](#)"

² Barnum, Matt (April 15, 2019) Chalkbeat Indiana, "[Are teachers unions helping or hurting schools? Here's what the latest research tells us.](#)"

³ Delgado, Paulette (May 10, 2021) Institute for the Future of Education, "[The Role of Teachers Unions.](#)"

⁴ Vachon, Todd and Ma, Josef (June 2015, Vol. 30 No. 2) Sociological Forum, "[Bargaining for Success: Examining the Relationship Between Teachers Unions and Student Achievement.](#)"

⁵ Wydra, Abigail (January 20th, 2018) Chicago Policy Review, "[Teachers' Unions Improve Student Achievement: Insights from California Charter Schools.](#)"

⁶ Han, Eunice and Maloney, Thomas (October 24, 2019 Vol. 46, Issue 1) Sage Journal, "[Teacher Unionization and Student Academic Performance: Looking Beyond Collective Bargaining.](#)"

⁷ Center for American Progress (March 25, 2014), "[Teachers Unions and Management Partnerships: How Working Together Improves Student Achievement.](#)"



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INCREASE SCHOOL FUNDING

1. Increase funding by \$500 million in the second year to basic tuition support, equating to a 7.98% increase, instead of the 1.6% increase enacted last session.
2. Increase the current \$160 million textbook subsidy by an additional amount in the second year of the biennium.
3. Create a state grant to augment ESP wages and/or benefits in the 2nd year of the biennium.
4. Provide a 2% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to the base pension of Indiana’s TRF and PERF members.

The monetary goals articulated by the governor’s commission were based on 2019 dollars. Indiana just reached the 2019 starting pay goal of \$40,000 in 2023.

However, Indiana has not reached the 2019 goals of average teacher compensation.

Inflation means that the expected 1.6% statewide average increase enacted last session for the 2024-25 school year will result in 188 of 294 school districts projected to see less than a 1% increase in their basic grant, with more than half of the school districts at a 0% increase. With 3+% being inflation, all but 21 school districts will be above inflation in basic grant funding, risking the progress made in improving Indiana’s ranking in teacher compensation.

The \$40,000 teacher starting pay in 2019 is equivalent in purchasing power to about \$47,828.21 today, an increase of \$7,828.21 over four years, considering an average inflation rate of 4.57% per year.

The current teacher shortage is also driven by low teacher pay relative to other college graduate occupations and an increasingly stressful work environment. **This must be addressed.**

School Funding

In 2019, the Governor’s Commission on Teacher Compensation called for the fulfillment of two major teacher salary objectives:

1. Achieve a starting teacher salary of at least \$40,000.
2. Achieve an average teacher salary of at least \$60,000, which would put Indiana in the upper half of the upper half as compared to Indiana’s surrounding states.

2023 TEACHER PAY RANKINGS

State	Starting Pay	Ranking	Avg Salary	Ranking
Illinois	\$42,213	23	\$72,315	12
Indiana	\$40,959	29	\$54,596	39
Kentucky	\$38,010	44	\$54,574	40
Michigan	\$38,963	39	\$64,884	16
Ohio	\$40,959	29	\$54,596	39
Wisconsin	\$39,995	35	\$60,724	24
US Avg	\$42,969*	--	\$66,675	--

Source: [NEA](#)



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Textbook Funding

The \$160 million subsidy is insufficient, and administrators lack funds to cover the costs of materials, leading to a situation where the state inadequately takes over school funding (this time with textbooks) while restricting local solutions.

Professional Pay and Respect for ESPs

ESP compensation in Indiana ranks 35th in the nation, and many ESPs work additional jobs to supplement their income. To address this issue:

1. Provide medical insurance coverage to all ESPs employed by school districts.
2. Offer training to ESPs on student discipline and behavioral issues.
3. Create opportunities for career advancement and access to additional work hours.
4. Provide paid leave for ESPs through sick days, personal days, parental leave and FMLA.
5. Maintain ESPs' contractual agreements with districts.
6. Support the creation of a commission to identify comprehensive information concerning ESPs in each school district and report findings to the general assembly.
7. Grant collective bargaining rights to ESPs.
8. Create a grant program designed to recruit and retain ESPs, including signing bonuses, benefits packages and commercial driver's license certification costs.

COLA for Retirees

Public Employees' Retirement Fund (PERF) and Teacher Retirement Fund (TRF) members have seen only a single COLA since 2009 – a 1% increase to the benefit. In the 15 years since 2009, the consumer price index (CPI) changed by 2.55% per year on average, resulting in a cumulative CPI inflation of 42.22%.

Providing adequate retirement security is important, especially given the impact of inflation on purchasing power. Public employees rely on modest pensions to retire with dignity and respect.



PRESERVE PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHER/STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

1. Increase transparency on hires with parents, requiring districts to inform parents when their student is being taught by an adjunct permitted "teacher."
2. Ensure mentors under the adjunct teacher law are paid for additional duties.
3. Restore discussion rights with the exclusive representative on hiring adjuncts.
4. Require the Department of Education to approve adjunct hires for certification and state accountability.

Lowering standards is not the way to solve Indiana's teacher shortage. In most cases, parents are not aware that their kids are being taught by individuals who are not certified or licensed to teach their kids. Lack of minimum professional standards de-professionalizes teaching, increases teacher turnover rates and leads to higher costs for school districts.

Further, there are increased costs to a school district and, worse, to student learning when there is a high staff turnover rate. The Learning Policy Institute estimates that teacher turnover costs school districts \$20-30,000 for every teacher who leaves the district. Non-retention, coupled with the cost of new recruitment, can total 150% of the departing teacher's salary.

Other pitfalls of failing to address teacher retention include a reduction in safeguards and state accountability and the increased likelihood of hirings based upon nepotism and/or other special treatment.

ISTA recommendations equate to a set of minimal standards for recognizing teaching as a bona fide science and art.



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DEVELOP RESOURCES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT OF EDUCATORS OF COLOR

1. Increase funding and access to mentoring programs to retain educators of color.
2. Support teacher residencies and career ladders, especially for educators of color.
3. Create a state commission to study state licensing practices and barriers for educators of color, promoting diversity in the teaching workforce.
4. Support pipelines to teaching and teacher prep candidates, focusing on increasing the numbers of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) educators and addressing barriers to college completion for BIPOC students enrolled in teacher preparation programs.
5. Support paraprofessionals and provide opportunities for them to become licensed classroom teachers.

Indiana lawmakers took an initial and important step last session in embracing a diverse teaching force when it enacted HEA 1637 to increase the annual scholarship amounts for minority educators. To further this progress, lawmakers should act on:

Mentoring, Induction, Residencies and Career Ladders

1. Increase funding and access to mentoring programs to retain educators of color who already face a higher rate of turnover in school environments with additional challenges.
2. ISTA has supported teacher residencies and career ladders. This is a potential opportunity to include educators of color.
3. Increase statewide funding for professional development to assist beginning teachers with a particular focus on BIPOC educators and their needs and challenges.

4. Comprehensive induction programs should be included to familiarize beginning educators to their new school settings.

Supporting Diversity Practices in Staffing

Create a state commission to study and make recommendations on at least the following:

1. Assessment of state licensing practices to determine whether bias exists in testing.
2. Identify barriers for educators of color into the teacher workforce and create efficient recruitment strategies.
3. The creation of partnerships with local communities and higher education institutions to identify and encourage potential BIPOC individuals to enter the profession of education.
4. Strategies around providing incentives to hire diversity coaches and trainers.

Supporting Pipelines to Teaching and Teacher Prep Candidates

1. Provide supports for Educators Rising chapters in public schools and Aspiring Educators in higher education, particularly with a focus on increasing the numbers of BIPOC educators.
2. Address barriers to college completion at the higher education level to reduce dropout or non-completion among BIPOC students enrolled in teacher preparation programs. Students of color face greater college loan debt than their white peers.⁸

Support Paraprofessionals

1. Provide opportunities, funding and resources to build a pipeline of paraprofessionals to become licensed classroom teachers.

⁸ Learning Policy Institute (April 19, 2018) "[Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color.](#)"



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PROVIDE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS AND REDUCE STUDENT DISCIPLINARY ISSUES

Create a three-year pilot program around student social emotional learning to address physical and mental health issues in elementary, middle and high schools.

Fix the growing student discipline issues in classrooms by restoring student discipline as a mandatory discussible item, creating a class-size reduction program and forming a state-level task force on improving student discipline, including chronic absenteeism.

Social Emotional Learning Supports

Establishing a three-year pilot program centered on student well-learning, with a focus on addressing both physical and mental health issues, is crucial to supporting students.

This initiative should encompass diverse geographic and socio-economic settings, spanning elementary, middle and high school levels. Key resources will be allocated to hire additional guidance counselors, social workers and school psychologists, effectively reducing student-to-professional ratios.

To ensure effective progress tracking, while respecting privacy, school districts will be required to develop anonymous monitoring plans. This program will involve 30 participating school districts, constituting 10% of the total, with funding allocated on a sliding scale based on student population size. The total appropriation for this initiative amounts to \$20 million annually, providing an average of 13 additional professionals each year per participating district. This comprehensive approach aims to address the pressing concerns of student well-being and bolster the learning environment.

Addressing Student Discipline

The National Center for Educational Statistics has reported a concerning trend, with 87% of school districts experiencing increased student behavioral problems attributed to COVID-related factors. Furthermore, chronic absenteeism trends are also becoming a concerning issue. According to the IDOE, about 221,000 Indiana students struggle with chronic absenteeism, which amounts to missing 10% of the school year, or about 18 days. Absenteeism has risen nationally as well with over 70% of districts post-pandemic, as revealed by EdWeek Research Center Surveys.

These issues have placed a significant burden on educators, with one-third of survey participants, including teachers and administrators, indicating a substantial increase in student misbehavior since the onset of COVID, and nearly 70% observing a noticeable uptick. This growing challenge diverts valuable teacher time from instruction, highlighting the importance of effective management of student behavior to create a conducive learning environment.

To address these issues, intentional efforts and targeted resources are essential, as administrators have identified a correlation between the surge in student misbehavior and staffing shortages.