

*ISTA President Teresa Meredith's remarks from news conference announcing ISTA's legislative priorities for the 2017 General Assembly.*

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Thank you for attending today.

I am Teresa Meredith kindergarten teacher from Shelbyville and president of the Indiana State Teachers Association.

Since ISTA's founding more than 160 years ago, ISTA has led the charge for establishing, growing and funding public education. Educators and advocates saw the need for an educated workforce, taught by trained, professional educators. That need continues today.

ISTA remains the leading voice in public education statewide representing nearly 40,000 educators who dedicate their careers to:

**Our kids. Our schools. Our future.**

More than 90 percent of Hoosier families send their children to community public schools. Let's pause on that statistic – more than 90 percent.

The non-stop education reform discussion in the Statehouse would seem to suggest that Hoosier parents are fleeing public schools, but they're not. And, ISTA's legislative agenda refocuses Indiana's priorities on the more than 90 percent of kids and families embracing public schools.

**Our kids need an environment where they can thrive.**

The new federal education law, Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA, puts the decision of testing into our hands. Let's take this opportunity to alleviate the stress that testing places on our kids by reducing over testing.

A de-emphasis on testing while reducing class sizes will allow educators to teach for learning, rather than teach for the test.

**Our kids need less testing and more time to learn.**

Preschool has been a hot topic of late. ISTA fully supports the growth of a foundational preschool program. All of our kids deserve to start off on the right foot.

Not only does preschool provide a jumpstart, it places our kids on the path toward meeting developmental milestones, but it also allows educators to identify developmental delays.



However, educators only have until a child reaches 5 years old to identify and address such delays. **ISTA asks that lawmakers extend that deadline to 9 years of age.** This will give educators more time to work with students that need extra attention to meet developmental milestones, thus improving the child's odds of success in learning throughout his school career.

Kids spend a significant amount of time in school, but there are issues during out-of-school time that impact how they learn.

**Twenty-six percent of children in the U.S. will witness or experience a traumatic event before they turn four years old, and that should alarm us all.**

Reactions to the trauma many children face interferes considerably with their ability to learn and to demonstrate appropriate behavior in school. Using Trauma Informed Care, the school can serve as a critical system of support for a child working through the impact of trauma.

Instead of saying, "what is WRONG with this child?", the question becomes, "What has happened to this child?". Indiana should create a safe/supportive schools program, similar to the one in Massachusetts, and create a grant program to allow the Indiana Department of Education to coordinate training for schools on trauma informed care.

**Our schools support students, educators and the community.**

Indiana ranks 49 of 51 states and District of Columbia in expenditures for public K – 12 schools per student based on fall enrollment.

This is a far cry from where Indiana has traditionally been over the past two decades. Funding and resources will always top the list of factors that impact quality learning programs. **Indiana needs to focus on supporting its K – 12 public schools, where caring educators like bus drivers, building engineers, office staff, administrators and teachers all come together to meet the needs of more than 90 percent of Indiana's students.**

Our schools will only flourish with the best educators. Recruitment and retention of quality educators means ensuring becoming an educator in Indiana is competitive for college grads and veteran educators.

The average teacher salary across the U.S. was \$57,420 in 2014 – 15. Indiana's average was \$50,877, and Indiana currently ranks 27th in average teacher salaries.



However, if adjusted for inflation, Indiana has the second worst decline in teacher salaries in the country over the last ten years. While some states' average teacher salaries rose during this period, the national average fell by 1.6 percent, with Indiana's real decline fell by 11 percent.

If we go a step further and compare to average incomes of other college grads in Indiana, the pay gap grows, with the difference being more than \$26,000. We must address the challenge of teacher pay in Indiana and there is a path to doing so. One path to encourage and motivate educators is through recognition of a job well done or additional education attainment. Let's reinstate bargaining options such as:

- Separating teacher evaluation from salary calculations at least until student testing has finally become consistent and solid.
- Broaden the bargaining timeline. This would allow for more accurate financial projection based on ADM counts and benefits costs.
- Prohibit school districts that have excessive cash balances and rainy day funds from claiming deficit financing at the bargaining table.
- Restore bargaining of all salary and wage issues, including performance and masters pay, as well as hours worked.
- Fix the master's degree law so that it includes all master's degreed-professionals, not just one year of recognition-the year it is attained.

Along with salaries that will hold steady with the national average and restoration of some collective bargaining, Indiana needs to refocus our taxpayer dollars on our public schools – not slowly chip away at public school funding through vouchers and charters.

**Today, Indiana's voucher program is operating at a loss to taxpayers in the amount of \$40 million for the 2013 – 14 school year.** Initially, \$16 million was awarded to 3,900 students. This has grown to \$116 million to nearly 30,000 students, with more than \$8 million going to 16 voucher schools rated D or F. More info on this can be found in the charts provided in your packet.

It is past time to separate the funding for vouchers from the community based school funding.

**Charters in Indiana** have grown from 11 in 2002 to 75 in 2013. Now more than 34,000 kids attend charter schools.

Supporters of charter schools often remind us all that these are public schools. So with that in mind, let's require the same transparency that is expected of public schools. A few solutions:

- Charter school's public meetings should be held in the area of the school.



- Charter board members should file a statement of economic interest and financial disclosure to prevent conflicts of interest.
- Charter schools should meet statewide curriculum and academic standards, and instructors should be licensed teachers.
- Charter school teachers should be able to organize and collectively bargain without interference by or discouragement from administration or the governing body.

**Our future is directly linked to teacher recruitment and retention. We need the best educators to teach our kids and bolster our schools.**

The path to achieving this is through recognizing professional standards and eliminating the high stakes consequences of teacher evaluations.

The pressures linked to student standardized testing create unreasonable workloads for teachers and serve as disincentives to anyone considering taking a challenging assignment in a hard to staff school. Attrition is higher in schools facing A – F pressure.

This simply exacerbates the shortage dilemma, because low performing schools continue to see a revolving door where effective teachers are choosing to move on for better or more supportive options elsewhere.

It is time for Indiana to:

- Place a moratorium on using student data for high stakes consequences linked to teacher evaluations, until we get stability in standards and assessments over several years.
- Maintain local control over development and implementation of performance evaluation models.
- Prohibit state mandated percentages of impact of student test scores into the teacher evaluation
- Include teachers in the development of local plans and in any audit of evaluation systems.

We know incoming and seasoned educators are interested in professional development opportunities – and we know that educators who receive ongoing professional development have a greater impact on their students.

It is well past time for the state to incentivize National Board Certification. Indiana has fewer than 200 Nationally Board Certified Teachers, where more than 11,000 educators across the country have achieved this certification. It is both performance-based and peer-reviewed, and data has shown that these NBCTs have a positive impact on student achievement as well as on improving colleagues' quality of instruction.

The process is intense, and yields a more focused and reflective teacher.



It is time Indiana consider this form of national certification as a means to ensure the highest quality of educator in Indiana's schools.

There are more solutions offered in our legislative agenda, so please review the full ISTA Legislative Agenda at [ista-in.org](http://ista-in.org).

**All of these are part of putting our kids as our first priority, understanding that to do that, we must support our local public schools in order to build a stronger future for all Hoosiers.**

**Thank you for attending today, and I look forward to talking with you more about our kids, our schools, our future.**

