



Indiana
State
Teachers
Association

I'd rather be
teaching
but this is
important.

ISTA ADVOCATE TOOLKIT



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Welcome

Thank you for stepping up to become a voice for public education! Your decision to advocate for community public schools is powerful—and it matters. The Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA) created this Advocate Toolkit to help you turn your passion into action and make a lasting impact.

Advocacy is more than politics—it's about standing up for students, educators and the communities that rely on strong public schools. Education should never be a partisan issue. By joining this movement, you stand with the vast majority of Hoosier families who believe in and support the promise of public education.

Every year, advocates like you shape the future at the Indiana Statehouse. Thousands of calls, emails and conversations have already driven meaningful change—and now it's your turn to build on that success. Together, we can secure the resources, respect and policies our schools need to thrive.

This toolkit is your roadmap. Use it to stay informed, speak out and connect with legislators. Your voice can help win increased funding, protect educator autonomy and stop harmful reforms that put our kids at risk. When you speak up, you don't just influence policy, you change lives.

Let's make this session count. Let's fight for our kids, our schools and our future—because they deserve nothing less.

What We're Fighting For

- Equitable funding and stronger early education opportunities
- Fair pay and comprehensive benefits for every educator
- Access to high-quality professional development and sensible regulatory reforms
- Robust student support systems and safe learning environments
- Policies that protect educator safety and advance equity in our schools

Find ISTA's full legislative agenda at ista-in.org/priorities.

Thank you for your dedication to our kids, our schools, and our future.

Priorities





Your Story, Your Power!

Sharing your story is one of the most powerful ways to connect with legislators and policymakers. When you explain how an issue directly affects you or your community, you bring that issue to life and make it real. We encourage you to use the sample messages provided, adapting them to reflect your own experiences, as you advocate for public schools.

Addressing the Needs of Educators and Students

Indiana's public schools are facing a critical challenge: too many classrooms lack qualified teachers because of years of underfunded salaries, diminished professional respect and growing demands on educators with limited resources. These systemic issues must be addressed to ensure every student has access to a high-quality education.

- **Competitive Compensation:** Low starting salaries and stagnant wages throughout educators' careers discourage talented individuals from entering or staying in the profession. This is especially alarming as Indiana faces record shortages in areas like special education, STEM and early childhood education.
- **Respect for Professional Expertise:** Increasing micromanagement and attacks on educators' autonomy are demoralizing, making it harder for teachers to do what they know is best for students in today's complex and diverse classrooms.
- **Supportive School Environments:** Educators need planning time, mental health resources, manageable class sizes and fully funded schools to help every child thrive.
- **Equity for Every Student:** Every child deserves access to a neighborhood school staffed with qualified teachers, nurses, counselors and support personnel to meet academic and emotional needs.
- **Systemic Solutions, Not Short-Term Fixes:** One-time bonuses and lowered licensure standards do not solve the root causes of teacher shortages. Indiana needs long-term strategies that strengthen the teaching profession.

Thank you for your commitment to our students, our schools and the future we are working to protect. Your engagement, voice, and willingness to show up make a real difference in shaping public education and strengthening our communities.



Indiana State Teachers Association

2026 Legislative Priorities

Strengthening Educator and Student Safety

- Expand teacher collective bargaining rights to ensure educators have a voice in decisions affecting teaching, working conditions and school environments.
- Strengthen reporting and accountability requirements for violence against teachers and other school employees so incidents are accurately documented and addressed.

Improving Classroom Conditions and Student Learning

- Establish clear, consistent cell phone policies that support student learning while giving educators a voice in implementation.
- Create responsible guardrails for the use of artificial intelligence in schools that protect student privacy, promote transparency and support effective teaching.
- Improve implementation of science of reading and math instruction requirements by ensuring professional development is accessible, flexible and provided at no cost to educators.

Fixing TAG and Supporting Fair Educator Pay

- Fix the Teacher Appreciation Grant (TAG) so it is fair, collaborative and supports educator morale, rather than pitting teachers against one another.
- Reestablish a Teacher Pay Advisory Board to develop long-term, statewide recommendations to raise teacher pay to at least the national average.

Protecting and Strengthening Public School Funding

- Increase public school funding in the second year of the biennium to address inflation and keep pace with student needs.
- Restore local school funding impacted by recent property tax changes and ensure replacement revenues are identified.
- Address excessive school district cash and rainy day fund balances by allowing educators to bargain the use of funds held beyond prudent reserve levels, so dollars intended for classrooms are used as intended.

Supporting Education Professionals and Retirees

- Extend Family and Medical Leave Act protections to education support professionals who work at least 120 days in a school year.
- Update outdated school bus speed restrictions to improve safety for drivers and students.
- Provide a second-year 13th check for retired public school employees to help offset inflation.
- Improve accessibility at the Statehouse to ensure full participation by educators and the public.

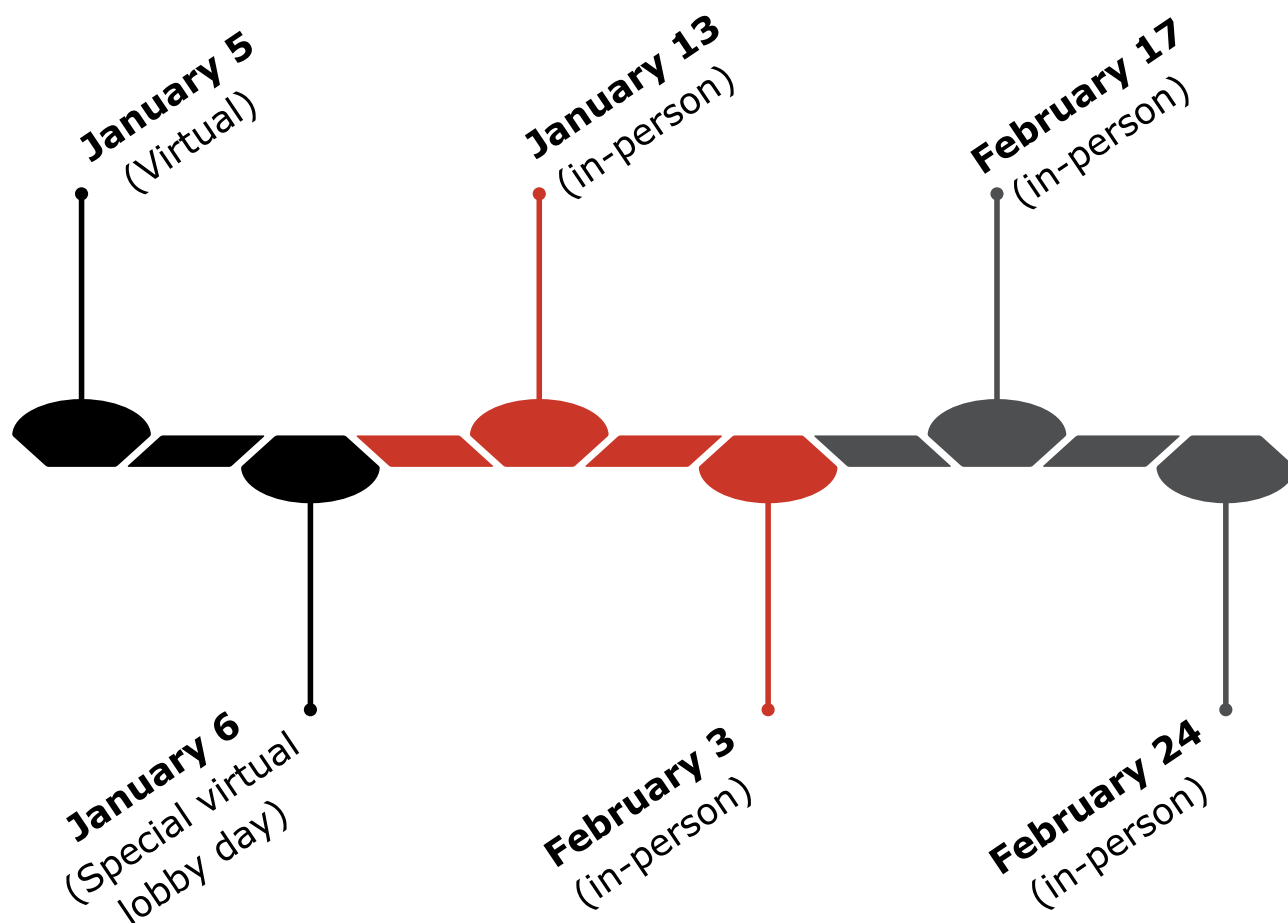
Ensuring Voter Voice in School Boards

- Support school governance models that retain a fully elected school board.

OUR KIDS. OUR SCHOOLS. OUR FUTURE.



Days of Action & Legislative Briefings



Scan to register for Days of Action. All virtual meetings begin at 7 p.m. ET. In-person events start at 10:30 a.m. ET, with sign-in available at 10 a.m. ET. Members are encouraged to schedule meetings with legislators in advance and to include the names of the senator and representative they plan to meet when registering. To coordinate a local Day of Action, contact your ISTA UniServ Director.



ISTA Legislative Briefings & LAT Updates

Virtual briefings provide legislative updates, advocacy opportunities and next steps for Legislative Action Teams (LATs). All meetings start at 7 p.m. ET.

Schedule:

- Monday, Jan. 5
- Monday, Jan. 12
- Tuesday, Jan. 20
- Monday, Feb. 2
- Monday, Feb. 16



Turn Awareness Into Action



Call Your Legislator

Contact the House and Senate by phone at **800-382-9841 (House)** and **800-382-9467 (Senate)**.

- The switchboard will direct you to the legislative assistant of your legislator.
- Leave a message that specifies the bill(s) and your position, and ask your legislator to call you back.
- Don't be discouraged if you do not receive a call back. The number of contacts made on a particular bill are tracked by their assistants. That helps them understand what bills have community concern or support.

“

What to Say

- Identify yourself by name.
- Explain why you are calling: “I am calling to support/oppose HB/SB.”
- Be polite and concise. Developing one or two brief talking points will focus the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message.
- Ask your legislator their position on this issue. Don't assume that your legislator has prior knowledge of your issue. Be calm and respectful, and be prepared to educate, using local examples to accentuate your point. If the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.
- Thank your legislator or the person who took your message for their time and consideration.

”

ISTA's Charge Today

Solving Indiana's educator shortage requires a two-pronged approach—recruiting diverse, talented individuals into teaching and retaining experienced educators who are leaving due to burnout, low pay and lack of respect. Key policy priorities include:

- Increasing pay and benefits
- Improving working conditions
- Restoring respect and professional autonomy

Lawmakers must commit to providing the funding and resources necessary to support public schools and close gaps between high- and low-income communities. Every student deserves a fair chance to succeed—and that starts with strong, well-supported educators.



Write Your Legislator

- Find your legislator's email and mailing address by using our tool at ista-in.org/our-advocacy.
- Address your legislator "Dear Representative/Senator (Last Name)"
- Be specific. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter.
- If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, be sure to identify its full name and number, e.g. House Bill: HB, Senate Bill: SB.
- Try to send your letter while the issue is still under consideration.
- State your position. Explain why you support or oppose this issue. Keep in mind that your personal, local examples concerning the impact of this legislation are most powerful. Be courteous and to the point, keeping your letter focused on one issue.
- Ask for a response. Indicate to your legislator that you would appreciate a reply containing their position on the issue.
- Follow up. If you agree with your legislator's vote, take the time to let them know. Similarly, if you disagree with their vote, inform your legislator.



FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR

Find who represents you in the Statehouse. Connect with your legislator to advocate for what's best for our kids, our schools and our future.

SEARCH



Indiana
State
Teachers
Association

Find Your Elected Officials

Enter your home address information to find and contact your elected officials

Street Address

Postal Code

Find Your Officials



Attend Local Events

Engaging Legislators Effectively

- Attend meetings to discuss key education issues and pending legislation, noting that some topics may be new to legislators if they are outside their committee assignments.
- Take photos of the educators who attend with you to document collective engagement.
- When appropriate, take a photo with your senator or representative to highlight educator presence and participation.
- Share your advocacy on social media and tag ISTA so the engagement can be amplified:
 - Threads, and Instagram: @ISTAmembers
 - Facebook: @IndianaStateTeachers

Educator presence matters, and visibility strengthens advocacy.



Legislative Visits: Building Influence Through Connection

Meeting with legislators remains one of the most effective ways educators can advocate for public education. These conversations create opportunities to share perspective, build trust and shape decisions that affect students, schools and communities across Indiana. The goal is not perfection, but clarity, preparation and relationship-building.

Preparing for the Visit

Having a general understanding of a legislator's committee work, priorities and past positions can help frame the conversation. Reviewing ISTA's legislative agenda provides helpful context, especially when connecting broader policy goals to lived experience. Many educators find it most effective to center on one or two key issues and explain how they show up in real classrooms, schools or communities. Scheduling the meeting in advance and remaining flexible with time helps ensure a productive exchange.

During the Visit

Legislative meetings typically begin with introductions and a brief overview of your role in education. Keeping the conversation focused on the issue at hand helps maximize limited time. Personal experiences often resonate more deeply than statistics alone and help ground policy discussions in reality. Listening carefully to a legislator's perspective and engaging in dialogue strengthens understanding and mutual respect.

After the Visit

Following up with a brief thank-you message helps reinforce the connection and restate key points. Ongoing communication, such as sharing occasional updates from your classroom or community, can help sustain the relationship beyond a single issue or legislative session.

Be Informed and Intentional

Know the issue you are raising and ensure it falls within the scope of state policy. State legislators are most effective when engaged on matters they can influence directly. When possible, reference a specific bill or statute to anchor the conversation. Clarity and specificity strengthen advocacy. ISTA is also a valuable resource for discussing concerns and understanding how they connect to current legislative priorities.



Lead With Lived Experience

Policy becomes real when it is connected to people. Sharing how an issue affects your classroom, school or community adds depth and credibility to the conversation. When appropriate, naming potential challenges or unintended consequences of a proposed solution builds trust and demonstrates thoughtful engagement.

Be Mindful of Timing

Legislative impact is often shaped by when an issue is raised. Staying informed through news outlets or ISTA helps align outreach with key moments in the legislative calendar. Early engagement, especially during committee discussions, is often most effective, though some issues require swift attention later in the session.

Advocate With Integrity

Effective advocacy is firm, respectful and grounded in relationship-building. Legislators are more responsive to conversations rooted in mutual respect and shared purpose.

Choose the Right Communication Method

Different situations call for different approaches. Written communication, such as letters or emails, are effective particularly when directed to your own legislator who represents your community and constituency.

Build Relationships Over Time

Lasting influence grows from ongoing connection. Reaching out periodically with updates or positive reflections from your work in education helps establish rapport and keeps educators' voices present beyond moments of urgency.

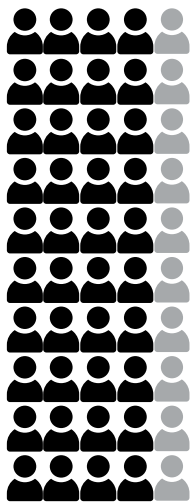


Indiana’s Legislative Landscape

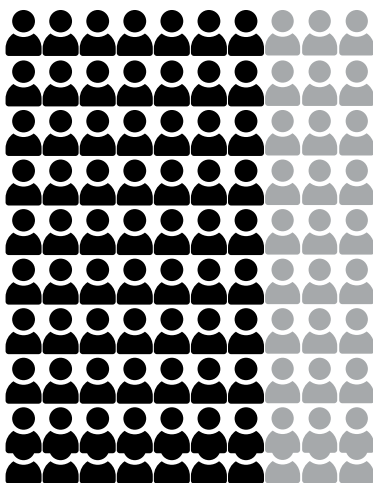
What is the Indiana General Assembly?

Indiana’s legislature is made up of 100 members in the House of Representatives and 50 members in the Senate. Together, they are known as the General Assembly. The General Assembly meets for four months in odd-numbered years (long session) and two and a half months in even-numbered years. This year, due to redistricting, the session began early on Dec. 1, 2025. The session is expected to conclude in February 27.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY: 150 MEMBERS



SENATE: 50



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES: 100

The 150 members of the General Assembly are elected by the citizens of the districts in which they live. Every two years, all 100 representatives are elected to two-year terms. Although senators are elected to four-year terms, half of the 50 senators are elected every two years.

To hold a seat in the General Assembly, a person must meet certain qualifications. You must be:

- A citizen of the **United States**
- An Indiana resident for at least **two years**
- A citizen of the district for at least **one year**
- At least **21 years of age** to serve in the House of Representatives
- At least **25 years of age** to serve in the Senate



Indiana House of Representatives

The Indiana House of Representatives meets on the third floor of the Statehouse, with a public gallery on the fourth floor. Members have offices throughout the building, and visitors may leave notes with chamber doorkeepers: Republicans on the left, Democrats on the right. House sessions are livestreamed at iga.in.gov.

The House includes 100 members elected to two-year terms. The current makeup is 70 Republicans and 30 Democrats, shaping committee control and legislative outcomes.

Key Leadership Roles

The Speaker of the House is the chamber's most influential leader, controlling the agenda, committee assignments and which bills advance. The Speaker's priorities largely determine what education legislation moves forward.

The Minority Leader represents the minority caucus and plays a central role in debate, negotiation and advancing alternative perspectives.

Why This Matters for ISTA Advocates

House leadership drives what happens—and what does not. Understanding these roles helps advocates engage strategically to protect educator voice, secure funding and advance strong public education policy in Indiana.



Speaker:
Todd Huston, Republican



Minority Leader:
Phil GiaQuinta, Democrat

House Standing Committees

The House has more than 20 different standing committees that hear bills relative to each committee's subject area. In the House, most of the bills ISTA will be tracking will be heard in the Education, Employment, Labor and Pensions and Ways and Means Committees.



Senate

The Senate is located on the third floor of the Statehouse. A viewing gallery is available above the chamber on the fourth floor.

Senate members have offices throughout the Statehouse. If you would like to speak to your senator or give them a note, see one of the doorkeepers at either side of the Senate chamber. While facing the chamber, the Republican doorkeeper is on your right and the Democratic doorkeeper is on your left.

The Senate can convene at various times throughout the day. A live video stream can be found on the General Assembly website (iga.in.gov).

The Senate is comprised of 50 members. As of the writing of this toolkit, there were 40 Republicans and 10 Democrats.



President/Lieutenant Governor:
Micah Beckwith, Republican



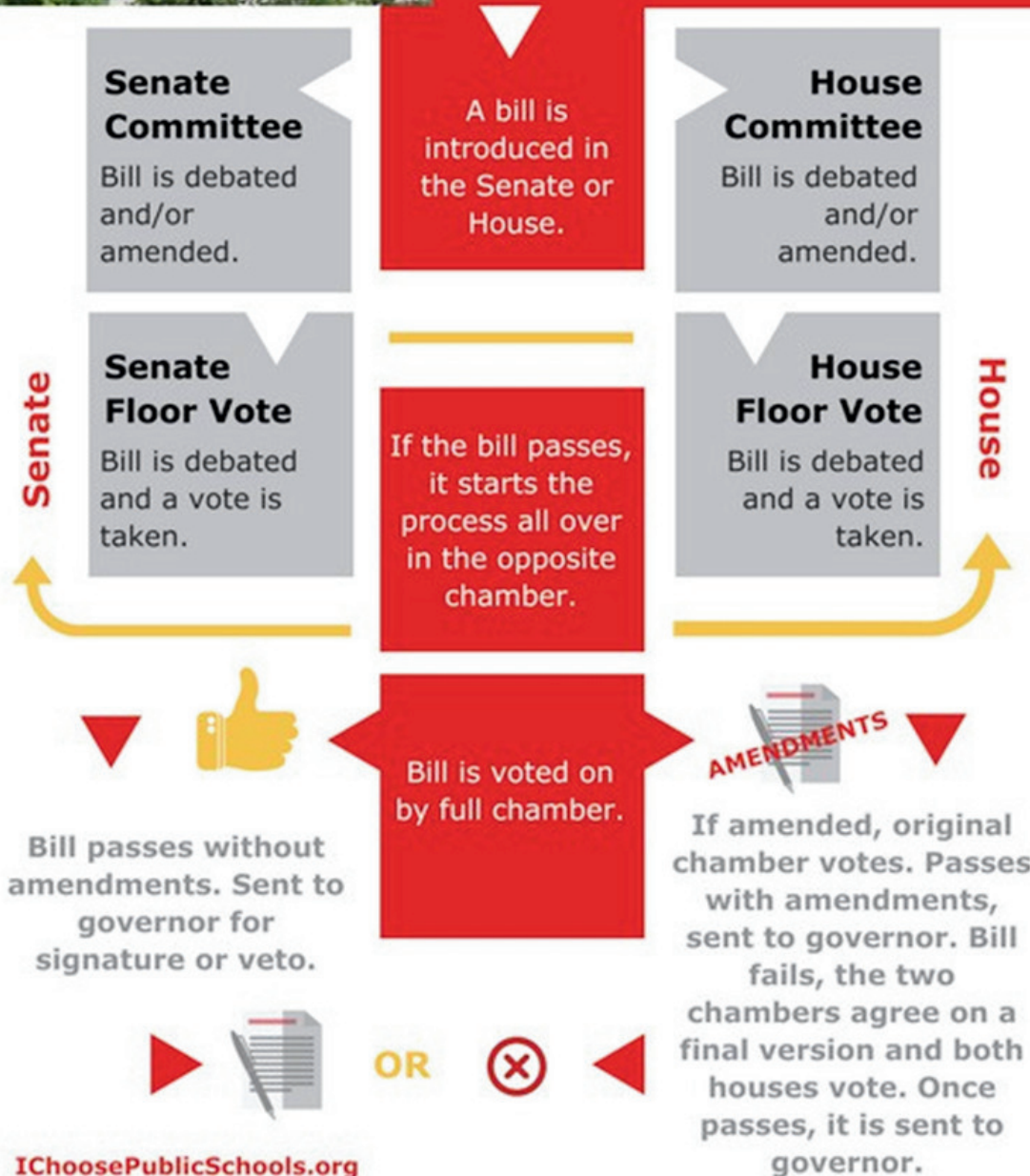
President Pro Tempore of the Senate:
Rodric Bray, Republican



Minority Leader:
Shelli Yoder, Democratic

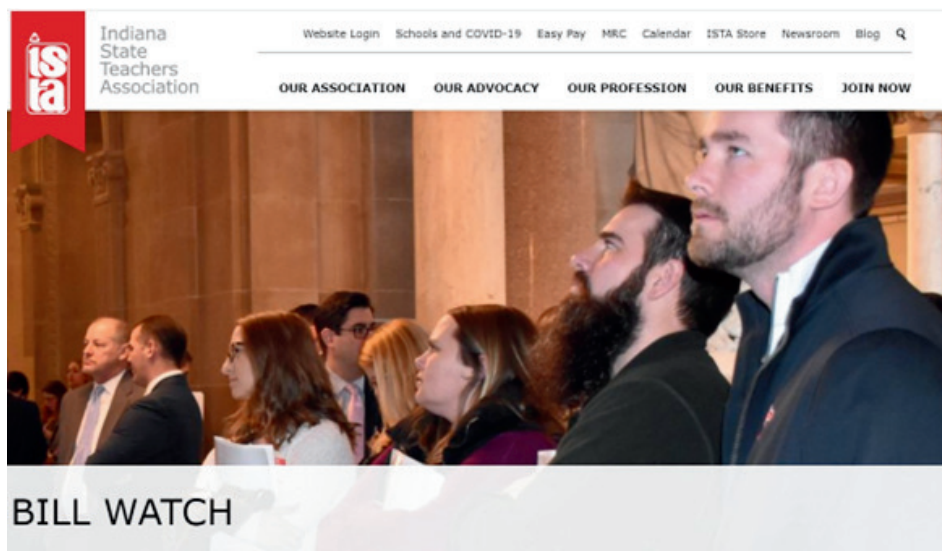
Senate Standing Committees

The Senate has more than 20 different standing committees that hear bills relative to each committee's subject areas. Most of the bills ISTA will be tracking will be heard in the Education and Career Development, Pensions and Labor and Appropriations Committees.





Tools for Informed Advocacy



Find and Track Legislation

During the legislative session, ISTA monitors bills that impact students and educators, including education policy, public retirement benefits and collective bargaining. You can follow these bills through the Bill Watch page under Our Advocacy at ista-in.org.

Use the ISTA Advocacy Action Center

The ISTA Advocacy Action Center can be found at ista-in.org/our-advocacy. This page helps you stay informed and engage with elected officials efficiently. By visiting the advocacy page and ISTA blog regularly, you can track current action items and stay updated on local and national developments. The Action Center is designed to make it easy to stay connected and take action on the issues that matter most to public education.



TAKE ACTION: Tell legislators to prioritize public schools in state budget



Stay **Informed**. Stay **Engaged**. Make An **Impact**.



Check your inbox for ISTA's weekly legislative update newsletter

Legislative updates • Events • Educator voices • Action alerts



Send a Letter to the Editor

Your voice matters in shaping public understanding of community public schools. Writing a letter to the editor is a powerful way to reach your neighbors and local decision-makers. Each newspaper has its own submission process, so check their website before sending.



Tips to strengthen your message:

- Make it personal. Share your lived experience and connect emotionally.
- Offer direction. Name a solution or clearly state what action you want readers or legislators to take.
- Keep it concise. Aim for 300 words or fewer.
- Start strong.



Get Social



Follow ISTA on social media for updates, shareable content and advocacy opportunities.

Connect with us:



- Facebook: Indiana State Teachers
- X / Threads / Instagram: @ISTAmembers
- Bluesky: @ista-in.org



After the Meeting: Strengthening the Work

Legislative meetings do not end when the conversation does. Thoughtful follow-up helps strengthen relationships, track advocacy efforts and build a deeper bench of educator voices across the state.

After meeting with legislators, advocates are encouraged to share brief follow-up information so ISTA can better coordinate advocacy, support future outreach and identify members interested in speaking on key issues.



Who You Spoke With

Let us know which legislator(s) or staff members you met with and the general topic(s) discussed. This helps ISTA coordinate follow-up and track engagement statewide.



Speaking Experience

Indicate whether you have previously spoken with legislators, testified publicly, spoken with media or participated in advocacy events. Knowing this helps match experience with future opportunities.



Interest in Speaking

Tell us if you are interested in speaking on education issues in the future—whether in meetings with legislators, public forums, or media opportunities. Sharing your interest helps ISTA elevate educator voices intentionally and strategically.



How to Navigate the Indiana Statehouse

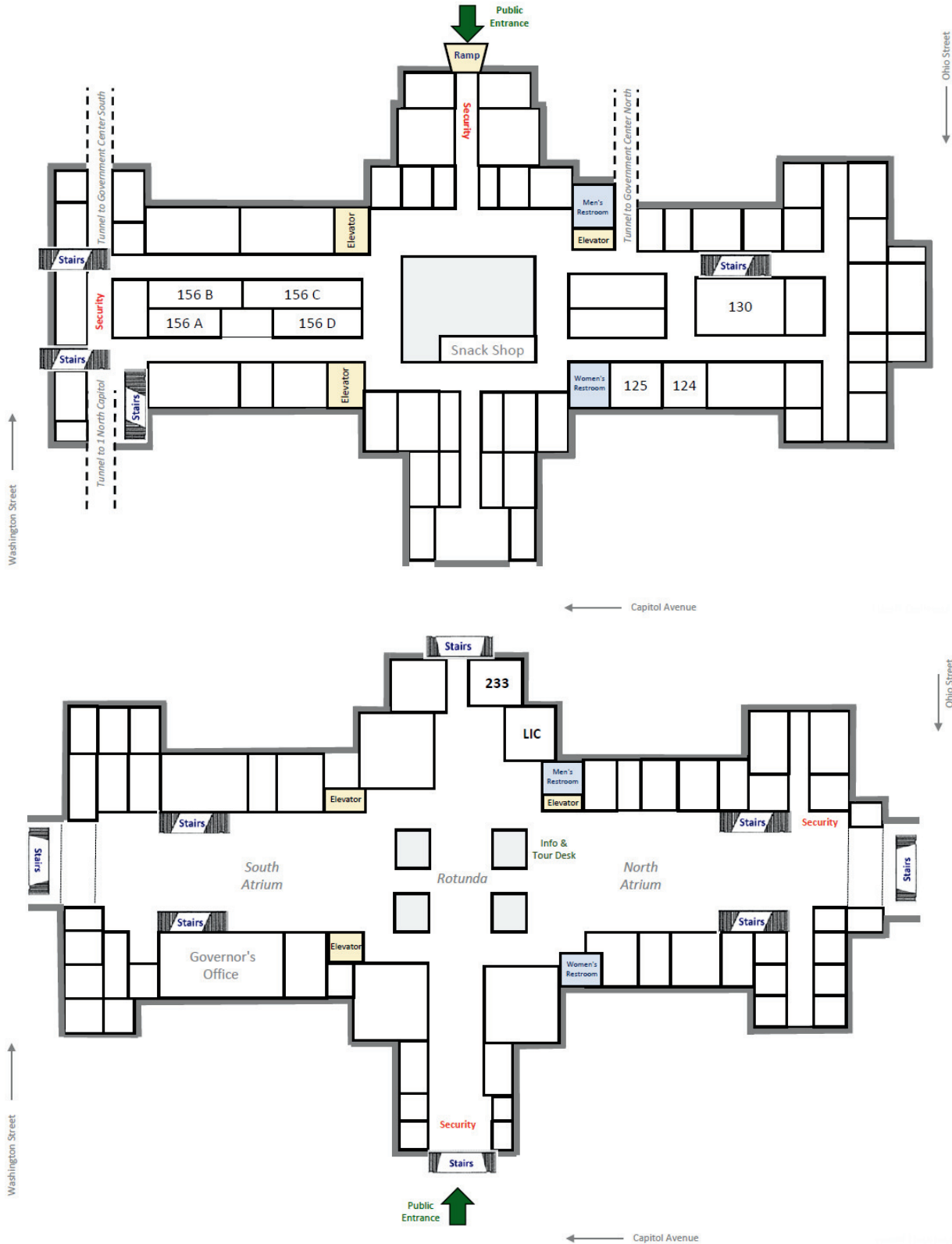
The Indiana Statehouse is located at 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

Enter the Statehouse through the east entrance from Capitol and Market Streets. All visitors must pass through security and metal detectors before entering. Firearms, knives and other weapons are prohibited.

Note: The basement of the Statehouse is considered the first floor. Remember this as you determine what floor you need.

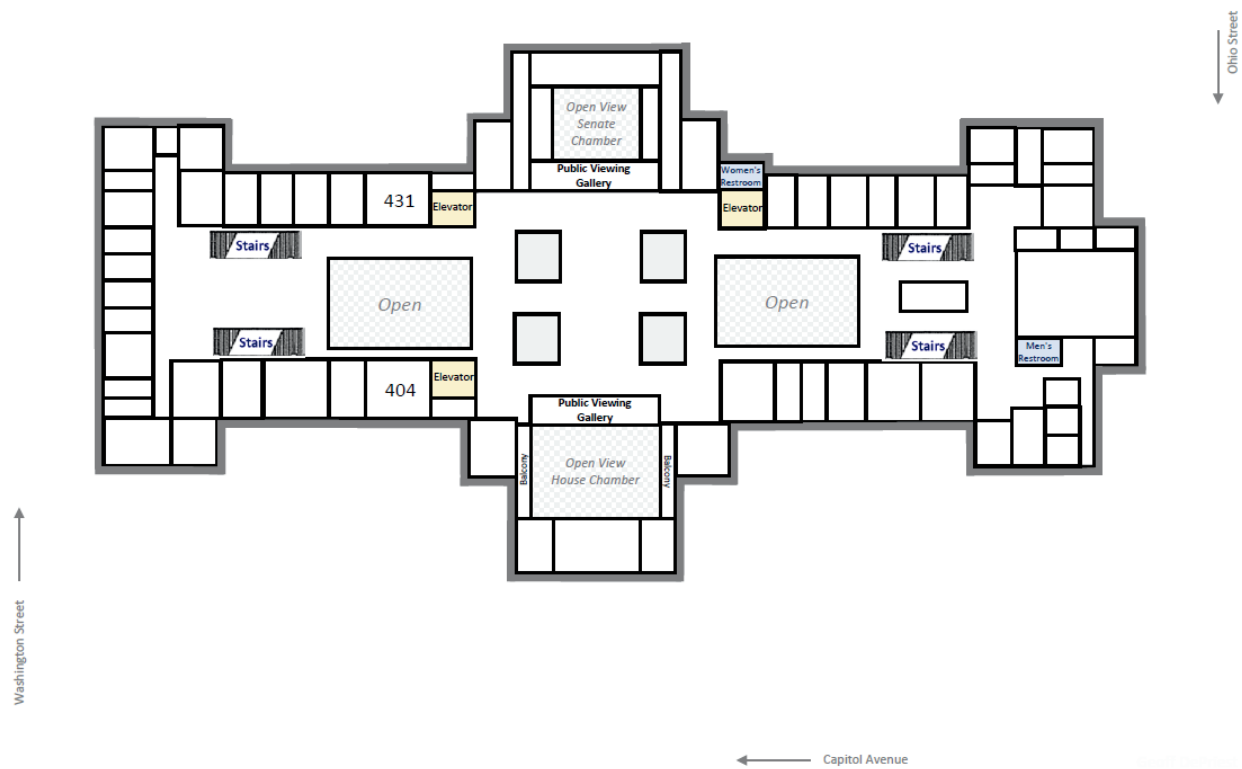
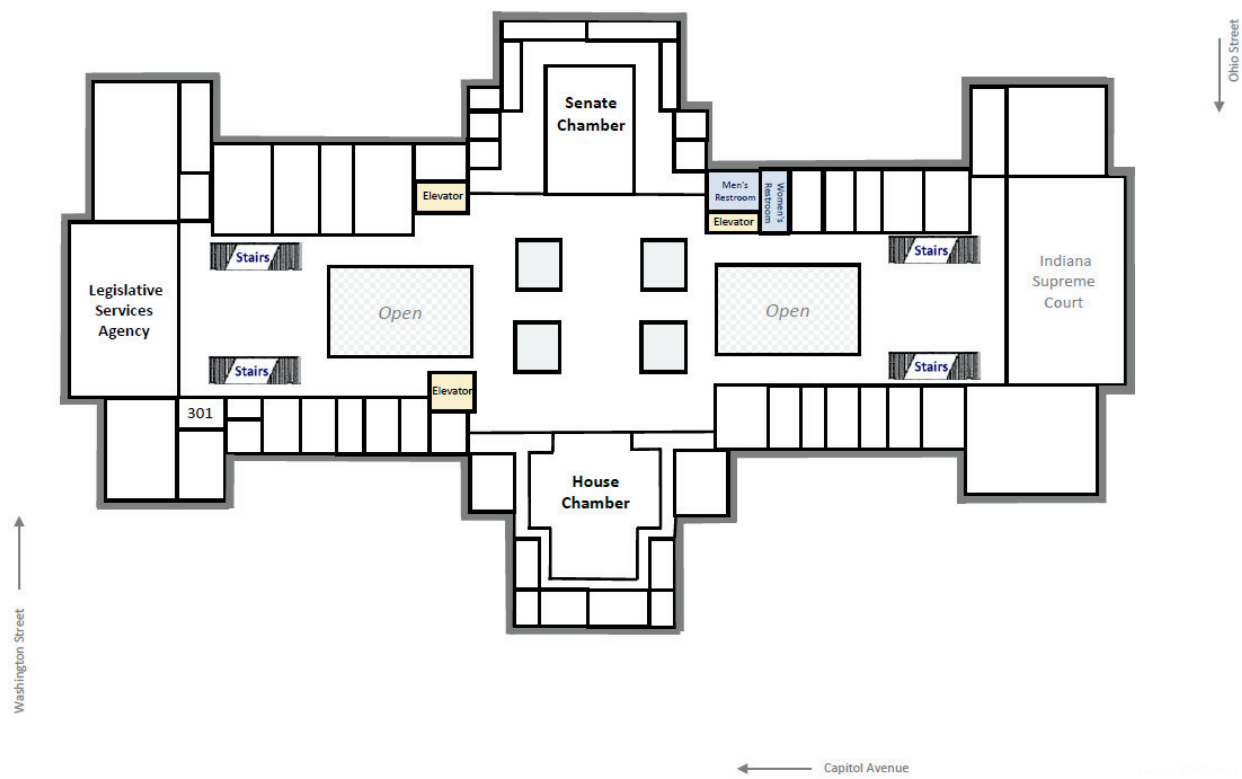


First and Second Floors





Third and Fourth Floors





Indiana State Teachers Association

**150 W. MARKET ST., STE 900
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ISTA-IN.ORG**

Our kids. Our schools. Our future.