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# Fulfilling the Promise of Public Education in Illinois

VISION 2030



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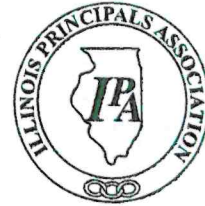
Vision 2030 represents the second time education stakeholders fostered collaboration and unity among education organizations across the state to create an advocacy framework for public education in Illinois. The first initiative, Vision 2020, resulted in numerous achievements, including the passage of the Evidence-Based Funding Formula, Illinois Balanced Accountability Model, and Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act.

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# Future-Focused Learning



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# Letter from Vision 2030 Partners

In November 2012, statewide education organizations united to develop a comprehensive visioning process for enhancing public education in Illinois in the long term.

That effort resulted in Vision 2020, the first-of-its-kind blueprint for public education in Illinois that sparked legislative action on school funding, teacher recruitment policies, college and career readiness, and the state's accountability model.

However, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the landscape of public education has been significantly altered, presenting immense challenges and prompting increased scrutiny.

A new vision was needed to propel Illinois forward in designing a system that better serves the needs of diverse learners, attracts new people to the profession, enhances student opportunities, and continues the state toward long-term predictable funding.

In October 2023, the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), Illinois Principals Association (IPA), Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), the Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity (SCSDD), Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS), Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education (IAASE), and The Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools (AIRSS) launched Vision 2030 with the goal of articulating what the education community stands for and aspires to realize.

This Policy Framework is the culmination of multiple in-person sessions and a statewide engagement effort that included input from more than 1,000 stakeholders, ranging from the southern tip of Illinois through the northern Chicago suburbs. Most importantly, the ideas encapsulated in Vision 2030 represent priorities from the practitioners who work inside and outside of school buildings to improve the education outcomes of children from all backgrounds.

On behalf of the near 2 million school children in Illinois, the Vision 2030 partners encourage the General Assembly, the Governor, and all stakeholders to review this Policy Framework and begin to take action to build an even brighter future for Illinois students.





## **Priorities for the Future**

- 1** **Promote future-driven skills that allow for more college and career exploration**
- 2** **Enhance student safety and well-being**
- 3** **Attract and retain a high quality and diverse educator pipeline**
- 4** **Promote curriculum and instructional flexibility to meet the unique needs of local communities**

The following pages contain recommendations for how to improve the current teaching and learning system in Illinois.



## Recommended State Policy

### 1 Promote future-driven skills that allow for more college and career exploration

**Encourage Career Exploration.** Public education is responsible for preparing students for college and careers with the integration of emerging technologies, both known and unknown, as well as for global citizenship. Advocacy is needed for the development of more flexible certification pathways, industry credentials, and/or micro-credential programs to meet a greater pool of student needs.

**Promote Dual Credit.** Opportunities for students to experience college and careers while in high school support classroom learning and prepare students for post-secondary success. Currently, the decision to offer programming in conjunction with postsecondary institutions is still not delivered equitably nor is it focused on what is in the best interests of students. Our goal is to ensure equitable access for all students in Illinois within their current school district with funding to support free community college enrollment for students. Further develop the Dual Credit Quality Act or other alternative credentialing options to increase student access to these offerings.

**Expand Dual Credit Teacher Pool.** The ability of students to take dual-credit courses within the districts/schools in which they attend is important for expanding access to these opportunities. To accomplish this, advocacy for the expansion of the number of K-12 teachers eligible to teach dual credit courses is necessary, and advocacy for the removal of barriers to accreditation or eligibility is essential to achieving this goal (i.e., if they are approved to teach AP in the subject area, then they should be eligible to teach dual credit).

**Study the Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI).** Establish a task force to study the impact of AI on K-12 school communities in Illinois and produce a toolkit regarding the responsible use of AI in Illinois K-12 schools. The task force should analyze potential benefits and challenges/risks, ensuring the integration of AI supports educational goals.

### 2 Enhance student safety and well-being

**Support Student Safety.** All students have the right to be educated in quality facilities that are conducive to learning and safe for all students and personnel. Advocacy for the creation of a task force to develop and share a repository of best practices, or centralized network, with funding sources, for districts to meet the safety and security facility needs of their students will support equitable and flexible student safety statewide. Coordinating this responsibility offers several benefits:

- **Unified Strategy:** A group of relevant constituents and experts on schools and school safety, including ISBE, can develop a Comprehensive Security Plan, providing consistent guidance and best practices for all schools to be used as a framework for ensuring school safety.
- **Resource Management:** A central repository of tools, templates, and training materials can be created and managed, streamlining access for schools and school districts.
- **Consistency and Equity:** Community and need-based safety standards can be applied across all schools, reducing disparities and fostering an equitable environment.
- **Expertise and Innovation:** Coordinated responsibility can leverage specialized knowledge to develop forward-thinking strategies addressing emerging threats.
- **Enhanced Regional Support:** Coordinated responsibility can provide tailored assistance to ROEs and ISCs in implementing state-wide safety protocols.
- **Efficient Resource Allocation:** Coordinated responsibility allows for optimized funding and better tracking of safety programs' impact.



**Support the Whole Child.** As student outcomes expand from a pure academic focus to the “whole child,” the measures by which we evaluate school effectiveness should continue to diversify and evolve. Advocacy for the creation of a task force to develop and share a repository of best practices, or centralized network, with funding sources, for districts will better support meeting the physical and mental health needs of their students. This advocacy should promote and enhance community partnerships along with aligning appropriate instructional resources. The findings and funding sources should be made available to support districts interested in enhancing the resiliency of learners through best practices to meet the needs of the students in their communities.

### 3 Attract and retain a high quality and diverse educator pipeline

**Develop a campaign to generate inspiration regarding careers in education.** The state, in partnership with education associations, should develop a sustained marketing campaign highlighting the benefits and rewards of a career in public education.

**Create a regional framework to successfully establish a grow-your-own program for 9-12 students to become educators.** As part of a regional framework, include dual-credit partnerships for teacher preparation pathways, on-the-job training for teacher assistants, practical experience for high school students, and scholarships for students pursuing teacher licensure. Develop an equitable state-supported model for early-career educator financial support.

**Restructure licensure in the state to provide flexibility.** The state should restructure licensure and allow grade-band and endorsement flexibility as well as increased flexibility for district leaders to appropriately staff their buildings considering teacher shortages and the inability to fully staff buildings. Furthermore, the state should allow alternative professional development supports to increase endorsement and certification options, including, but not limited to, competency-based approaches, micro credentials, and job-embedded learning, especially for individuals with significant job experiences who are changing careers.

**Evaluate and improve the efficiency of educator licensure pathways for traditional undergraduate and graduate programs.** The state should grow alternative licensing programs to expand educator licensure options for candidates in higher education programs. Alternative teaching licensure programs must remain rigorous but allow for additional and more flexible pathways to credentialing beyond traditional programs.

**Improve the educator’s professional experience.** The state needs to ensure support for school leaders, and that educators receive appropriate benefits. This includes, but is not limited to, pension security, professional autonomy and flexibility within the classroom, and a commitment from leaders to improve all educators’ professional experience.

### 4 Promote curriculum and instructional flexibility to meet the unique needs of local communities

**Protect Instructional Time.** The flexibility to educate students throughout the state in ways that meet the unique needs of communities is an essential component to a high quality and equitable education for all students. The state must protect instructional time by eliminating burdensome mandates that prohibit local school districts from innovating their curriculum and instructional programs in ways that best meet the needs of students in their communities.

**Advocate for Local Partnerships.** Promoting district and student partnerships will increase the number of students, particularly low-income and marginalized students, reaping the long-term benefits of programs offered in conjunction with business, industry, military, and post-secondary institutions. Greater strides should be made to offer a wide-range of quality dual-credit and career and technical education programs (CTE) consistently throughout the state, so all students can benefit. The state should focus on the development of cross-agency and community/family partnerships (such as the community schools model) to become whole child per the statutory definition: using a child centered holistic equitable lens across all systems that prioritizes physical, mental and social emotional health to ensure that every child is healthy, safe, supported challenged, engaged and protected. (105, ILCS, 5/3-11(b)). Partnership opportunities need to be flexible enough to meet unique needs across the state.



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# Shared Accountability





## Priorities for the Future

- 1** Reform the Illinois assessment system to be a timely and useful measure of student proficiency and growth over time
- 2** Reform the current accountability system to provide local flexibility for identifying indicators that create a more holistic view of student success
- 3** Reform the mandate process to ensure implementation procedures that promote flexibility and local decision making

The following pages contain recommendations for how to improve the current accountability system in Illinois.



## Recommended State Policy

### 1 Reform the Illinois assessment system to be a timely and useful measure of student proficiency and growth over time

**Provide unofficial student results to local school districts in near real-time.** Timely reporting of student assessment data is critical if the state assessment is to be useful to local school districts. The state should provide local school districts the unofficial individual student scores immediately upon closing of the testing window similar to the process of local assessment vendors. Immediately providing the unofficial individual student scores balances the need for school districts to receive timely results while still preserving the ability for the state to take its time to implement a quality assurance process before official aggregate results are released to the public.

**Align proficiency benchmarks to national distributions.** Illinois proficiency benchmarks do not align to national proficiency distributions. Illinois outperforms the national average on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) but, according to the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR), roughly only 30 percent of students meet proficiency standards. Proficiency benchmarks should be established for grades 3 through 11 that have a transparent definition aligned to national distributions to ensure a more accurate reflection of student performance and growth in a way the broader public will understand.

**Select an adaptive assessment that is an accurate measure of proficiency and growth both within and across grade levels.** While the purpose of the Illinois assessment system is to measure academic proficiency and growth against grade-level learning standards, it must also accurately measure growth over time. The new state assessment system, guided by the State Assessment Review Committee (SARC), should allow an individual student to demonstrate proficiency on learning standards at, below, or beyond their grade level, and should report a vertically articulated scale score to longitudinally track proficiency and growth over time.

**Allow district flexibility in administering the state assessment.** A new state assessment system should be developed to provide local school districts with the option to administer periodic benchmark assessments throughout the year. Providing an option to forgo costly third-party assessments and instead administer benchmark state assessments leading up to the end-of-year summative assessment will alleviate complexities and costs associated with monitoring student progress.

### 2 Reform the current accountability system to provide local flexibility for identifying indicators that create a more holistic view of student success

**Modify the accountability scoring system to differentially weight growth and proficiency.** While student growth and proficiency represent different constructs of student learning, growth and proficiency must be considered jointly when judging student performance. Proficient students should maintain proficiency, while students below proficiency should accelerate rates of growth to achieve proficiency over time. Therefore, within the broader accountability scoring system, student growth should be given more weight for students below proficiency and less weight for proficient students.



**Expand the construct of college and career readiness at the high-school level to include whole-child success indicators in grades 3 through 8.** The multi-metric approach of college and career readiness indicators at the high school level should be generalized to include whole-child success indicators in grades 3 through 8. De-emphasize chronic absenteeism as an isolated metric and instead incorporate chronic absenteeism within the context of a set of whole-child student success and readiness indicators.

**Shift the administration of the IL-Empower network and its resources to the ROEs/ISCs.** The fundamental purpose of school accountability should be to provide underperforming schools with the resources and support needed to improve. Empowering ROEs and ISCs to oversee and coordinate school improvement services will result in greater consistency of school improvement efforts, promote professional learning communities, and provide a systemic structure that is more efficient and impactful.

**Revise the criteria for annual summative designations to be fixed standards as opposed to normative rankings.** The current school accountability system utilizes school rankings as an underlying method to determine annual summative designations. To be Exemplary under the current system, a school must be in the top 10 percent of all schools across the state, regardless of their underlying performance. Similarly, the bottom five percent of schools are designated as Intensive Support, regardless of their underlying performance. The state should forgo the current ranking system and instead establish clear performance thresholds for summative designations in a manner that does not mathematically prohibit schools from receiving favorable summative designations.

### **3 Reform the mandate process to ensure implementation procedures that promote flexibility and local decision making**

**Distinguish between Essential and Discretionary mandates.** Schools are required to abide by numerous unfunded mandates. Since many mandates result in the pre-spending of Evidence-Based Funding (EBF) dollars, the state should create a subcommittee of the EBF Professional Review Panel to categorize each mandate as Essential or Discretionary. Essential mandates include those that are fully funded, federal, safety, or civil rights. Local school districts should be provided the flexibility to opt out of discretionary mandates through the local board hearing process and board action.

**Review all proposed mandates for their financial and operational impact.** Balancing the financial and operational impact of mandates with their intended benefit is critical to ensure that state policies achieve their educational objectives without creating undue challenges or unintended consequences. Striking this balance requires careful consideration of both costs and benefits. The state should require a cost-benefit analysis of all proposed mandates consistent with the spirit of the State Mandates Act (30 ILCS 805).

**Develop a modern application programming interface (API) to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Web Application Security (IWAS) system and require all data system vendors to support native integration.** The cumbersome and redundant process of reporting student and other system data to the state through its IWAS system is a hidden mandate that diverts resources away from students. The General Assembly should provide funding to ISBE for it to modernize the IWAS system to ensure interoperability of IWAS with data system vendors through APIs. Furthermore, the state should require that all data system vendors provide native API support with IWAS.



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# Predictable Funding





## **Priorities for the Future**

- 1** **Protect the integrity and funding of the evidence-based funding formula**
- 2** **Strengthen public education through pension reforms**
- 3** **Establish equitable statewide funding sources for capital and safety needs**
- 4** **Enhance financial flexibility for all school districts**

The following pages contain recommendations for how to improve current public school finance and funding in Illinois.



## Recommended State Policy

### 1 Protect the integrity and funding of the Evidence-based funding formula

**Fund the model at the annual statutory minimum of \$350 million (\$300 million into the formula; \$50 million into the Property Tax Relief Grant) before considering any revisions to its elements.** The legislature has funded the EBF model since FY 18 and continues to increase funding on an annual basis. However, it must be fully funded to effectively analyze all the benefits to all students in Illinois.

**Ensure that all students receive support at 90 percent of their adequacy target, calculated by the current EBF model's elements.** Any student, regardless of their location in Illinois, should have equal access to a high-quality education. Additionally, the full investment in the Base Funding Minimum is essential to prevent a regressive funding plan that could harm districts and students.

**Mandate the Professional Review Panel to review proposed changes to the EBF model, with the Illinois State Board of Education required to model any proposed alterations for the Panel's analysis.** Any proposed changes to EBF must adhere to a process that models the impact to all school districts and all students in Illinois. Legislation to create this process is necessary to maintain the success of the formula.

**Continue the EBF Distribution Model and mandated categorical payments annually to protect equitable distribution of funds.** All funds to support public education in Illinois must be provided to local districts on an annual basis. Advocacy must focus on the timely and predictable distribution of funds without any proration or delay.

**Require transparency and accountability through effective reporting on how evidence-based allocations are utilized.** All school districts will provide an accounting for the use of state funds. Professional leadership organizations will support districts to be visible and open to communicate the impact of EBF funding.

### 2 Strengthen public education through pension reforms

**Educate stakeholders, including educators, community members, and legislators, about pension systems that impact K-12, detailing their strengths and weaknesses.** A comprehensive strategy must be developed to educate all school employees, school board members, and legislators on how the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) and Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund (IMRF) impacts public education. Understanding the complexities, historical context, and long-term impact of the pension systems is critical for K-12 education in Illinois.

**Analyze issues with the Tier I and Tier II pension systems including, but not limited to, the benefits and harm of the TRS penalties, the impact of re-amortization of Tier I pension payments, and Tier II age and benefits.** Critical analysis of the tiered system is essential to the long-term solution for Illinois. Financial obligations and benchmarks must be determined for the state and local school districts to establish a long-term solution that is viable for Illinois.



**Identify a Tier II pension model that meets federal requirements for state pension plans, attracts and retains high-quality professionals and identifies new funding streams for pension systems.** Revisions to the current pension model must be determined to attract and maintain the high-quality staff who educate our students. All revenue sources that do not adversely impact school districts should be considered.

### **3 Establish equitable funding sources for Capital and safety needs**

**Leverage the County School Facility Sales Tax to Address capital projects, school safety and mental health supports.** Schools have benefited significantly from the funds to address their capital improvement needs. Consider the development of a statewide solution to provide these opportunities to all districts.

**Allow Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (PTELL) districts to levy for Health Life Safety (HLS) without counting against their maximum levy.** Currently, any HLS levy by districts who are tax capped limits their ability to generate one-time funds to address these capital needs without impacting the educational funding for their district. A solution in the current levy structure must be developed to address critical capital needs in tax-capped districts.

**Fund School Maintenance Project Grants annually.** The long-term maintenance needs of schools are at a critical point. The funding and allocation of school maintenance grants has been sporadic and inconsistent during the duration of the program.

**Expand Federal Title IV funding to increase school safety measures.** School safety continues to be the highest priority for all school districts in Illinois. A significant advocacy effort must be developed and prioritized to generate federal funding appropriations to address school safety needs for all schools in Illinois.

### **4 Enhance financial flexibility For all school districts**

**Make permanent interfund transferability for school districts to best manage federal, state and local resources.** District leaders and board members own the responsibility to manage and use taxpayer funds to operate schools. Antiquated funding restrictions need to be addressed to allow for maximum flexibility at the local level to educate students.

**Allow local boards to approve the use of HLS revenue to respond to 10-year Health Life Safety Survey or HLS Audit Finding.** The long-term complex requirement of state oversight for the local improvement of facilities is burdensome to school districts. ISBE should not have the authority to regulate this important and critical responsibility of local school districts.

**Create a process/mechanism to expand access to Debt Service Extension Base funding to all districts subject to PTELL and allow districts to levy certain costs outside of PTELL, such as Tort, IMRF/SS, and HLS.** Local school districts need the ability to create an annual levy based on needs of their local communities. Creating DSEB funding for all school districts for one-time local capital expenses is equitable and necessary. This will provide short-term and long-term financial stability to all school districts.



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## **The Vision 2030 Process was Facilitated by ECRA Group**

Headquartered in Illinois, ECRA Group is a premier K-12 research and analytics consulting firm that helps school districts and educational leaders improve student outcomes by adopting evidence-based practices.

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