



HOOSIERS FOR
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ENTERPRISE, INC.

Freedom and Opportunity Agenda – Education Plan for Indiana

Nearly half of Indiana’s taxpayer dollars are spent on K-12 education. At the same time, disappointing educational outcomes have led Hoosier parents to ask whether our schools are doing enough to prepare their children for success beyond high school. As our schools educate the next generation of Hoosiers, we must not rest until our public and private schools are the best in the nation.

By empowering parents, recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, prioritizing school safety, and raising academic standards for all students, the State of Indiana can meet this challenge and bring about a transformative impact on our education system.

To improve the quality of our K-12 schools, this plan proposes policies that:

1. Guarantee Universal School Choice for Every Hoosier Family.
2. Boost Teacher Pay and Improve Benefits.
3. Build a Strong Teacher Pipeline.
4. Prioritize School Safety.
5. Improve Quality and Raise Academic Standards.
6. Prepare Students for Success Beyond High School.
7. Put Kids First by Protecting Parental Rights.

By enacting the Freedom and Opportunity Agenda – Education Plan for Indiana, the State of Indiana can improve educational outcomes for every child and prepare them for success beyond high school, whether that means college, military service, or the start of their career.

Universal School Choice for Every Hoosier Family

School choice programs put parents in the driver’s seat, allowing them to choose schools that prioritize their children’s needs. Providing universal school choice will ensure every Hoosier family has the same freedom to choose their best-fit education.

Plan of Action

- Support and expand Indiana’s widely adopted school choice programs, including the Choice Scholarship Program, public school open enrollment, Education Scholarship Account Program, Private School / Homeschool Deduction, and the tax-credit scholarship program.
- Reform the Choice Scholarship Program to allow every Hoosier family, regardless of income, race, ZIP code, or other factors, to choose the school that best fits their children’s educational needs.

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- Double the size of the Education Scholarship Account Program, which provides flexible funding to families with students with special needs. In years where the program has leftover funding, children in foster care and active-duty military families could apply for grants.

Boost Teacher Pay and Improve Benefits

Having a high-quality classroom teacher is among the most important factors in a student's learning. As Indiana's schools educate the next generation of Hoosiers, the State must also take steps to recruit and retain the next generation of high-quality teachers. Just like in the private sector, that means taking concrete steps to enhance teacher pay and benefits options.

Plan of Action

- Increase Indiana's public teacher base salary, ensure teachers in high-need content areas have higher pay, and institute statewide student outcomes-focused performance pay to reward high-performing teachers.
- Guarantee teacher access to professional benefits, including by ensuring that every teacher is eligible for new parent leave and supporting individual teachers by providing a state-funded liability insurance plan.
- Enhance a teacher's health insurance options by empowering teachers to choose between their local health plan and the State employee health plan. If the State employee health plan is less expensive, allow teachers to capture the savings in their paycheck or their defined contribution retirement account.

Build a Strong Teacher Pipeline

As Indiana works to recruit and retain the next generation of high-quality teachers, it must also contend with teacher shortages in the immediate term. The State should adopt entrepreneurial solutions that expand the teacher pipeline by cutting red tape and leveraging data to prioritize the recruitment of high-need teachers.

Plan of Action

- Expand Indiana's homegrown teacher pipeline by continuing to invest in the Transition to Teaching licensure program, which allows Hoosiers with a bachelor's degree to change careers and become teachers on an expedited pathway.



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- Cut red tape for teachers moving to Indiana from other states by expanding certification reciprocity and license portability through the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact.
- Leverage the Educator Supply and Demand Marketplace to identify content areas and school districts with teacher shortages, and direct the State's resources toward recruiting these high-need teachers.
- Develop clear accountability metrics for Educator Preparation Programs that would allow the State to reform lagging programs and partner with successful programs to grow Indiana's teacher pipeline.

Prioritize School Safety

Currently, Indiana's school safety authorities are fragmented across different agencies. As modern threats continue to grow in complexity, the State must ensure that local communities and schools are supported so that no aspect of school safety falls through the cracks.

Plan of Action

- Establish the Indiana Office of School Safety to streamline and enhance existing authorities at the Department of Education, Department of Homeland Security, and Indiana State Police, led by an individual with experience in emergency response and the K-12 environment.
- Increase the funding available to the Secured School Safety Grant Program, which provides matching grants to help schools employ safety personnel and purchase safety equipment.
- Implement age-appropriate cyber safety training for students, including information about online safety, financial scams and phishing attempts, secure passwords, and the responsible use of online platforms (including generative artificial intelligence and social media).

Improve Quality and Raise Academic Standards

The State of Indiana spends nearly half of its budget on K-12 education. Parents, students, and taxpayers alike deserve to know whether these taxpayer dollars are being spent effectively to improve students' educational outcomes. The State should continue to invest in improving educational outcomes for students by focusing on math and reading cognition, instituting clear accountability metrics for schools, and removing distractions from the classroom.



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Plan of Action

- Continue to develop and implement high-quality, evidence-based instructional materials for reading and math in order to support universal third grade literacy and universal fifth grade numeracy and proficiency with fractions.
- Drive more funding into the classroom by increasing the percentage of state education dollars that are allocated to teacher salaries. Currently, the State requires every school district to spend at least 45 percent of its state education funds on teacher salaries.
- Restore clear accountability metrics for schools that focus on objective student outcome indicators and provide transparent, actionable feedback for schools.
- Work alongside education stakeholders to limit cell phone use on school campuses, thereby removing a chronic distraction from the classroom.
 - o This builds on the successes of SEA 185, which was passed earlier this year and banned the use of cell phones during instructional time.
- Develop institutional safeguards against divisive, non-curricular materials like Critical Race Theory and gender identity from being taught in our public schools.
- Direct the Department of Education to study the long-term learning loss and mental health impact of school lockdowns and mask mandates for children that were enrolled in Indiana schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prepare Students for Success Beyond High School

Every year, approximately 75,000 Hoosiers graduate from high school. While half of these students enroll in college, the other half pursue other opportunities. The State should continue to invest in programs that prepare each student for success in reaching their postsecondary goals.

Plan of Action

- Incorporate Indiana's new diploma rule into the school funding formula by rewarding schools for graduating students with honors readiness seals in each pathway, and providing enhanced incentives for graduating students with honors plus seals.
- Continue to invest in the Career Scholarship Account program, which provides eligible high school students with \$5,000 scholarships to finance career preparation experiences. This investment supports students who may complete internships, apprenticeships, and the most in-demand and valuable credentials as determined by employers.



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- Provide equal access for students with special needs, and allow these students to access the program past the 12th year of education.
- Empower students from a young age to explore their interests through enriching extra- and co-curricular activities, including robotics and the Innovate WithIN entrepreneurship competition.

Put Kids First by Protecting Parental Rights

Parents are the best advocate for their child’s wellbeing, and are the decisionmakers in their children’s lives, education, and upbringing. The rights of Hoosier parents to participate in their children’s education, safeguard their wellbeing, and protect them from divisive ideologies should never be in doubt.

Plan of Action

- Allow parents to access information about their children’s education, including the curriculum and assigned reading materials for their children’s classes, performance on statewide tests, progress towards earning a diploma and honors readiness seals, and other information as determined by the school.
 - Schools can use their current parent communication applications and websites to host this information.
- Require schools to respect and uphold the rights of parents as the decisionmakers in their children’s lives, education, and upbringing. This includes directly notifying parents about any physical or mental health concerns that arise at school, such as requests to use a name or pronouns that are inconsistent with biological sex.
 - In 2023, the Indiana General Assembly passed HEA 1608 to protect this fundamental parental right.
 - The State should monitor implementation of this legislation and identify opportunities to further bolster the rights of parents.
- Protect Hoosier girls from biological males who attempt to compete in girls’ sports.
 - In 2022, the Indiana General Assembly passed HEA 1041 to protect the girls on the field of play.
 - The State should continue to ensure that biological males will not compete against our girls on the court, in the pool, or invade the privacy of their locker rooms.