



VISION 20/20

Fulfilling the Promise of Public Education

Executive Summary

VISION 20/20

LETTER FROM THE VISION 20/20 PARTNERS

Education is an investment in our children's future, our state's future, and our nation's future. It is our responsibility as educators to reflect upon the current state of education in Illinois and take action to create an education system that meets the needs of all students.

Many times statewide organizations are better known for what they oppose rather than those things for which they stand. In November 2012, the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) initiated a visioning process in partnership with the Illinois Principals Association (IPA), the Illinois Association of School Business Officials (IASBO), the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB), the Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity (SCSDD), and the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools (IARSS) to unite the education community and to develop a long-range blueprint for improving public education in Illinois. Together we stand for excellence in education for all Illinois children.

Education reform policies have created a divisive relationship between educators and policymakers. Blaming teachers and education leaders is not a solution to the challenges that education faces in our state. We are all part of the system and need to work in partnership to conquer these challenges to create meaningful and lasting change.

Vision 20/20's policy platform reflects educators from across the state and is representative of opinions from the southern tip of Illinois through the northern Chicago suburbs. Although the City of Chicago operates under a separate school code, they face many similar challenges. This vision is the result of input from over 3,000 key stakeholders, discussions with field experts, and a review of current literature on best practices.

Conscious that no single legislative attempt at school improvement can be developed, implemented, or find success without the support, devotion, and hard work of all stakeholders, Vision 20/20 asks not just for state action, but also for local action and the support of educators across the state to **fulfill the promise of public education**. On behalf of the over two million schoolchildren in Illinois, we challenge the State Legislature, the Governor, and all stakeholders to take action.

Our organizations contributed their time, insight, and advocacy to the Vision 20/20 process. Together, we are committed to supporting and promoting the priorities of this vision.



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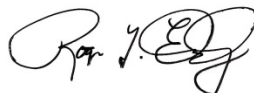
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OUR VISION

The uniting purpose shared across zip codes and political party lines in Illinois is the overwhelming belief that public education plays a defining role in ensuring equal opportunity. It is our collective duty to do all we can to guarantee every student, no matter his or her demographic or geographic identity, has equal access to a quality education.

“We believe public education works.”
(Vision 20/20)

As public educators, we believe public education works. We reject the premise that education in Illinois has failed but recognize its impact has not been equitably delivered to all student populations and that there are opportunities for continuous improvement. Now is the time to act. Our vision forward is clear.

We believe the key to continuous improvement in public education relies on the wisdom and innovation of public educators who work with students every day. This is a continuous process.

Through the Vision 20/20 process, four areas for prioritization emerged: highly effective educators, 21st century learning, shared accountability, and equitable and adequate funding.



Highly Effective Educators

The quality of teachers and school leaders is the greatest predictor of student achievement schools can influence. By attracting, developing, and retaining our state’s best educators, we can have a profound impact on student learning.



21st Century Learning

For success in life, students need more than knowledge of math and reading. It is time to expand the definition of student learning, commit to the development of the “whole child,” and invest in policies proven to link all schools to 21st century learning tools.



Shared Accountability

A quality education for all Illinois students cannot be ensured without the collaboration, compromise, and hard work of both educators and legislators. With that in mind, it is necessary to expand educator responsibility in the legislative process, create a shared accountability model, and restructure mandates to allow more local district flexibility.



Equitable and Adequate Funding

All students in Illinois are entitled to a quality education. It is our duty to ensure our students have access to all necessary resources by improving equity in the funding model, appropriating adequate dollars for education, and allowing local school districts the autonomy needed to increase efficiency.

Vision 20/20 shapes a vision for public education in Illinois to guide educators, legislators, labor, businesses, parents, and community members as we work together toward the common goal of fulfilling the promise of public education in Illinois.

RECOMMENDED STATE POLICY



Highly Effective Educators

Create Education Licensure Reciprocity Agreements. In order to recruit and retain highly qualified teacher and administrator candidates, the state should allow and streamline education licensure reciprocity agreements with states across the United States to ensure Illinois districts have access to the best quality candidates regardless of the state in which they received their initial license.

Expand Alternative Teaching Licensure Programs. Similarly, alternative teaching licensure should be expanded so desirable teacher candidates without licensure can participate in professional development programs and, with adequate and high quality training, be allowed to teach at any school throughout the state with appropriate induction and mentoring. To have the most immediate, positive impact alternative teaching programs should recruit well-educated individuals, incorporate tailored coursework, and provide mentorship.¹ Sufficient, high quality professional development prior to teaching and a long-term commitment beyond two years is necessary.

Provide Teacher Student Loan Forgiveness. Similar to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), and in order to ensure a more diverse teaching population, the state should continue to support and appropriate funds to expand teacher student loan forgiveness so minority teachers at all districts, not just low-income districts, can benefit. The support and expansion of loan forgiveness for teachers in underserved content areas (i.e., math, science, and special education) and those willing to teach in underserved parts of the state (i.e., high poverty and rural) should also be considered.

Establish Partnerships with Higher Education. ISBE and local districts should partner with higher education institutions to establish consistent admission and program criteria, as well as classroom experience requirements for colleges and universities offering teacher and administrator licensures in Illinois. Each institution should involve an advisory council made up of active superintendents, principals, teachers, and business officials in the design of preparatory programs.

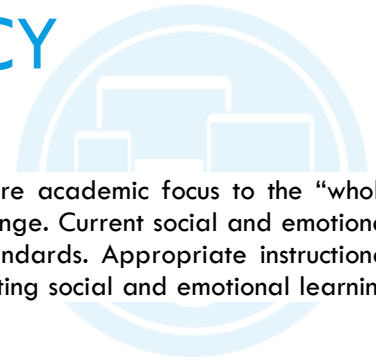
Fully Fund Mentoring for New Educators. ISBE currently requires mentoring for new teachers, principals, and superintendents. The development of new educators is a high-priority. As such, the state should fully fund mentoring for new educators.

Expand Educator Collaboration Opportunities. To create a culture of professional development, inclusive of teachers, staff, administrators, and Board members, sufficient time for collaboration must be allocated during each educator's workday. Time for collaboration provides the time to observe, discuss best practices, and develop effective instructional materials and strategies.

Enhance ROE/ISCs' Ability to Function as Regional Centers for Professional Learning and Innovation. Learning does not stop when an educator earns his or her degree; learning is a life-long process for educators. ISBE and the Regional Offices of Education/Intermediate Service Centers (ROE/ISCs), the Statewide School Management Alliance (IASA, IASB, IASBO, and IPA), and teachers unions (IEA and IFT) should collaborate to create consistent resources for professional development, starting with identifying what professional development is necessary. Across all forms of professional development, a focus on content, opportunities for active participation and learning, and alignment with other professional development leads to more successful learning experiences.²

RECOMMENDED STATE POLICY

21st Century Learning



Align Social and Emotional Standards. As student outcomes expand from a pure academic focus to the “whole child,” the measures by which we evaluate school effectiveness should also change. Current social and emotional standards should be clarified and aligned with the new Illinois Learning Standards. Appropriate instructional resources should be made available to support districts interested in incorporating social and emotional learning best practices.

Support Student Creativity and Innovation. Every effort should be made to maintain and enhance educational opportunities that encourage student creativity and innovation. Students should be provided the flexibility to follow their own pursuits and passions that will motivate them to be life-long learners.

Promote Individualized Learning. Children learn in different ways and at different speeds. Attention should be paid to each student’s learning through individualized learning plans, student goal setting, and differentiated instruction. Additional time and resources are necessary to support teachers in providing individualized instruction and experiences to support each individual student’s learning.

Engage Parents, Family, and Community. In order for students to achieve at high levels, families must be involved in the learning process. To encourage effective family-school partnerships, districts should welcome all families into the school community, communicate effectively, and support student learning both at home and at school.³

Develop a Balanced State Assessment System. Educators need the state assessment to produce real data that can effectively inform instruction and support innovative instructional practices. A robust state testing program that meets the needs of local districts would allow districts to forgo local assessments, decreasing the overall time spent administering standardized assessments during the school year. This, in turn, would decrease costs associated with testing. A balanced state assessment system should be aligned, consistent, flexible, fully funded by the state, based on realistic and effectively communicated timelines, and offer relevant professional development.

Offer Incentives for Expanding Preschool and Full Day Kindergarten Education. In order to capitalize on the benefits of early childhood education, the state should continue to increase funding for the Early Childhood Block Grant and create better incentives for districts to invest in early learning. Additional incentives to support full-day kindergarten, parent education, and support services should also be explored.

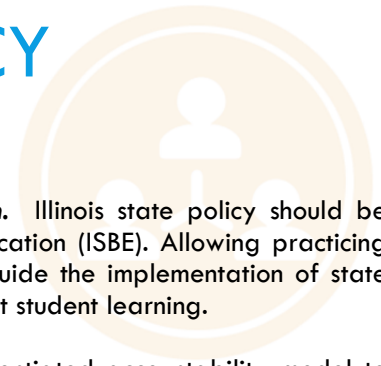
Promote Partnerships with Post-Secondary Institutions. Promoting district and student participation would increase the number of students, particularly low-income and minority students, reaping the long-term benefits of programs offered in conjunction with post-secondary institutions. Greater strides should be made to offer a wide range of quality dual-credit and technical education programs consistently throughout the state, so all students can benefit.

Encourage Career Exploration. To encourage local partnerships with businesses, the state should increase graduation requirement flexibility for students who participate in internships or apprenticeships. To increase outcomes, districts should focus on business-sponsored experiences, which are more likely to provide meaningful learning opportunities, limit options to only those companies with a plan to integrate students in a manner that enhances their education experience, and require the assignment of a mentor at the worksite.⁴

Provide High Speed Internet Connectivity to Every School and Community. Large investments in technology infrastructure to meet SETDA internet connection recommendations are needed to ensure adequacy and equity. Infrastructure investments should be pursued through funding partnerships for both school and community internet access to ensure learning continues beyond the school building and can enhance local economic opportunities.

Incorporate Technology in State Learning Standards. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) should consolidate the state technology standards in a meaningful manner with the new Illinois Learning Standards.

RECOMMENDED STATE POLICY



Shared Accountability

Allow Current Educators Representation on the Illinois State Board of Education. Illinois state policy should be revised to allow current educators to serve on the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Allowing practicing educators to serve on ISBE provides professional expertise that would help guide the implementation of state initiatives and help ensure that oversight and regulatory efforts positively impact student learning.

Adopt a Differentiated Accountability Model. The state should adopt a differentiated accountability model to focus on continuous improvement, recognize the diversity of struggling schools, and eliminate achievement gaps across the state. A differentiated accountability model would allow local flexibility, promote shared accountability, and be sensitive to local district improvements.

Multiple measures should be used to develop a dashboard for each district inclusive of student performance, adherence to best practices, and contextual evidence of continuous improvement at the local district level. The dashboard should provide the data necessary to determine the process by which schools and districts are reviewed in an effort to improve student outcomes, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve instructional quality. The model should include a series of incentives and disincentives at the district-level based on a district's initial results and subsequent performance.

Distinguish Between Essential and Discretionary Regulations. Schools are required to abide by numerous funded and unfunded mandates and regulations. To promote flexibility and local decision-making, as well as address financial and operational hardships, legislative and ISBE regulations should be the subject of renewed discussion to assign mandates into one of two compliance categories:

- Essential (focused primarily on fully funded, federal, student safety, and civil rights related mandates)
- Discretionary (focused primarily on unfunded, non-federal, educational process related mandates)

A task force of broad representation would be assembled to determine the categorization. School districts would be required to conduct board hearings and request input from the public and local bargaining units prior to approving decisions related to discretionary regulations. This process provides transparency and allows local public input and opportunity to respond to any proposed changes in compliance with discretionary regulations. The ISBE/Regional Offices of Education/Intermediate Service Centers Compliance Probe would serve as a tool to review applicable regulations to measure school district accountability and distinguish between essential and discretionary mandates.

Allow Districts to Opt Out of Mandates and Regulations. Legislation should be passed to allow school districts that forego state funding or demonstrate high performance to operate with greater flexibility from state-level regulations, consistent with existing policies and the original intent of charter schools. Legislation should be passed to allow districts that meet the criteria described above to submit a flexibility request. If approved, the district would be granted a four-year opt out from identified mandates consistent with the statutory freedoms afforded to Illinois charter schools. By allowing districts operating without state funds, or exceeding desired student outcomes, to opt out of process-specific mandates, the state can focus on supporting and improving the districts that need assistance the most while reducing state education costs.

RECOMMENDED STATE POLICY



Equitable and Adequate Funding

Adopt an Evidence-Based Funding Model. An evidence-based funding model, such as the model developed as part of the Illinois School Finance Adequacy Study, takes into account the cost associated with delivering quality, research-based programming, including allotments for teacher salaries and small class sizes. An evidence-based model should be used to assign the appropriate foundation level for each district individually, taking into account geographic conditions and student needs. Fully funding districts based on the model would ensure adequate funding for districts to locally determine and deliver appropriate and effective educational experiences to every student. For greatest efficiency, districts should be allowed flexibility to allocate state funds throughout their local district allowing them to better align resources to student needs. Resource accountability and transparency are also achievable with this model, especially for districts that have high student needs and do not produce adequate student outcomes or maintain financial stability.

Enhance State Spending. Enhanced state funding should be identified and secured to meet the needs of students and the continually expanding services that public schools are counted on to deliver. Educational leaders understand school finances can only be healthy with state assistance and that providing adequate and equitable school funding for children is a primary responsibility of state government. At the same time, districts should continue to pursue efficiencies, including but not limited to shared service agreements and other cooperative arrangements.

Restructure State Revenues to Match the 21st Century Economy. Revisions to the current state revenue structure are necessary to match our 21st century economy, better serve all Illinois taxpayers, and ensure sufficient funding for education. Legislation should be passed to both eliminate the Illinois state deficit and provide necessary funds for essential services, including education.

Create a Two-Year Funding Cycle with Year Ahead Budgeting. In the spirit of shared interest and to support long-range planning, Illinois school districts support a two-year budget cycle. Public schools desire the ability to function according to sound business practices. Education has been forced by the state budgeting process to make expenditure decisions before state funding decisions are final. State budgeting has to support local decision-making, especially in regards to personnel decisions, which account for 80 percent of district budgets.

The origin of the budget should begin with an adequate funding level. Creating a two-year funding cycle increases fund stability from year-to-year while reducing state bureaucracy. Once solvency and appropriate budgeting are achieved, the state should provide “year ahead budgeting,” so districts can plan two years into the future when budgeting and allocating funds for programs and personnel.

¹ Humphrey, D. C., Wechsler, M. E., & Hough, H. J. (2008). Characteristics of effective alternative teacher certification programs. *Teacher College Record*, 110(1), 1-63.

² Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(5), 915-945.

³ Parent-Teacher Association. (2009). *PTA national standards for family-school partnerships: An implementation guide*. Retrieved from http://www.pta.org/files/National_Standards_Implementation_Guide_2009.pdf

⁴ Better, J. V. (2007). Work-based learning and social support: Relative influence on high school seniors' occupational engagement orientations. *Career and Technical Education Research*, 32(3), 187-214.