

**Testimony of Dr. Katie Jenner, Ed.D.**

**Indiana Secretary of Education and Commissioner for Higher Education**

**United States Senate**

**Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP)**

Thursday, September 18, 2025 • 10:00 a.m. (ET)

**Executive Summary**

Indiana’s goal is clear: to meet every child where they are and ensure each has access to the quality education needed for lifelong success. This commitment extends to all 1.13 million Hoosier students attending more than 2,200 schools across our state.

Every day, Indiana’s educators are preparing students with the knowledge and skills required to thrive in a rapidly changing global economy. As technology advances and workforce demands evolve, the work of preparing students for life beyond high school is more critical than ever.

We also know this responsibility cannot rest on schools alone. Preparing students for a dynamic future requires the full partnership of families, educators, higher education institutions, business and industry leaders, policymakers, and community stakeholders. That is why Indiana has taken the bold step of aligning K–12 and higher education into one seamless vertical system—so that students experience a clear, connected pathway rather than a maze of disconnected requirements. With cohesive leadership and priorities across all levels, we can remove barriers, reduce duplication, and intentionally and urgently ensure opportunities for students.

To ensure every student reaches their full potential, we must remain focused on two priorities: building strong knowledge and skill foundations at every grade level, and guaranteeing access to meaningful college and career pathways during high school. By doing so, we help students discover their purpose, recognize their value, and explore the full range of opportunities available to them.

When we succeed in this mission, every Hoosier graduate will leave high school prepared for a dynamic future—whether they choose employment, enrollment in higher education, or enlistment in military service.

### **Three Pillars and Strategic Priorities**

Indiana's important work requires everyone working together, at the state, community, school, and family level. As we have worked collaboratively toward solutions, we have heard a number of topical themes on repeat, which focus our collective work into three pillars. To support these pillars, through the stakeholder engagement process, the following strategic priorities have been identified:

#### **Pillar 1 - Student Learning and Opportunity:** *Deliver Quality, Purposeful Educational Opportunities for Each Student*

- Expand access to high-quality, affordable learning by: strengthening literacy and STEM instruction; creating clear connections to college, career, and military pathways; leveraging technology to broaden opportunities; driving innovation through project-based and work-based learning; and ensuring transparent reporting of progress through the *Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed (GPS)* dashboard.

#### **Pillar 2 - Educator Talent, Quality, and Value:** *Elevate and Support Indiana's Educators*

- Strengthen Indiana's educator pipeline and profession by recognizing and celebrating impact, expanding "Grow Your Own" and apprenticeship pathways, improving access to professional learning and networks like the Indiana Learning Lab, and building better tools, data, and supports to recruit, prepare, and retain effective teachers and leaders.

#### **Pillar 3 - System-Alignment and Capacity:** *Increase Partnerships and Deliver Aligned, Effective, and Efficient Support*

- Reduce bureaucracy and streamline reporting, align state resources with educator and community input, build local capacity through collaboration across schools, higher education, and workforce partners, provide real-time problem-solving support, and ensure Indiana's strategic vision is implemented effectively.

## **Recent Tactics Driving Progress Across Indiana's Pillars**

By establishing a unified education vertical, Indiana is taking intentional steps to modernize and update priorities across K-12. We have been actively working to transform education through the following high-impact tactics:

### **Improving Quality and Raising Academic Standards**

- **Secured a historic literacy investment (\$170 million) focused on science of reading.** This investment allowed Indiana to deploy a number of comprehensive, strategic solutions aimed at achieving Indiana's goal of 95% of third graders reading by 2027. Literacy rates have now increased for four consecutive years, and 2025 represents the largest-ever single-year increase since the start of IREAD in 2013. Continued work includes:
  - **Indiana Literacy Cadre:** Provides early elementary teachers with embedded instructional coaching and support aligned with science of reading practices.
    - Cohort 1 (2022): 41 schools | Through Cohort 2 (2023): 199 schools | Through Cohort 3 (2024): 489 schools | Through Cohort 4 (2025): 564 schools
  - **Indiana Learns:** Provides \$1,000 grants towards learning support and tutoring services to students and families, regardless of their ability to pay.
    - Over 23,000 students have enrolled, and nearly 250,000 hours of tutoring have been provided.
  - **Indiana Learning Lab:** One-stop-shop providing educators and families with instructional resources, professional development opportunities, and other best practices.
    - Saw an increase of over 94,000 users since 2021 (6,000 users in 2021, over 100,000 today).
  - **IREAD at Second Grade:** Provides access to an early "On-Track indicator" for parents/families and teachers to determine if students will master foundational reading skills by the end of third grade.

- School Participation: 385 in spring 2022; 771 in spring 2023; and 1,076 in spring 2024; all second grade students participated in spring 2025.
  - Of the second grade students who participated in IREAD in 2025, 68% passed or are On-Track to pass by the end of third grade.
  - Over 96% of second graders who achieved On-Track in 2024 passed the assessment in 2025, thus showing the value and accuracy of the On-Track indicator.
  - With the help of this early indicator, educators were also able to identify students needing interventions to master foundational reading skills, allowing more than 65% of second graders who were identified as At-Risk in 2024 to pass in 2025.
- **Science of Reading Modules:** Online modules were developed to provide educators with additional science of reading training.
    - Nearly 7,000 educators have completed this training to date, earning 25 Professional Growth Plan (PGP) points.
  - **Redesigned Indiana’s largest assessment as a through-year vs. summative model.** The ILEARN through-year assessment includes three checkpoints and a shortened summative assessment at the end of the year, allowing educators to provide targeted interventions for students who are working toward key subject area milestones.
    - Over 1,340 schools opted in to pilot the checkpoints in the 2024-2025 school year; all schools will participate starting with the 2025-2026 school year.

### **Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed (GPS): Measuring What Matters:**

Indiana is re-envisioning how we measure school and student performance through the [\*Indiana Graduates Prepared to Succeed \(GPS\)\*](#) dashboard, a nationally recognized and award-winning model for transparency and student-centered accountability. Indiana GPS provides families, educators, and communities with clear, accessible, and future-focused data that shows how students are building the knowledge and skills they need for success—going far beyond traditional test scores.

The dashboard highlights a wide range of indicators, including but not limited to: academic performance, student attendance (the percentage of students attending 94% or more of school days), high school coursework completed before ninth grade, credentials of value earned, and completion of college- and career-aligned coursework. It also tracks long-term postsecondary outcomes for every high school in Indiana, such as median wages for graduates each year after graduation for 10 years, college enrollment upon graduation, and sustained employment.

At the heart of Indiana GPS is Indiana's *Profile of a Graduate*, which identifies five essential characteristics of readiness: academic mastery; career and postsecondary preparation through credentials and experiences; communication and collaboration; work ethic; and civic, financial, and digital literacy. Together, these measures ensure that Indiana equips every student to graduate ready to pursue their unique purpose—be it college, a career, military service, or wherever their aspirations lead.

As Indiana streamlines federal reporting, Indiana GPS will continue to serve as the public's clear and reliable window into student progress, school performance, and readiness for the future—ensuring families have the information they need to make informed decisions and communities have the insight they need to support continuous improvement.

Indiana GPS has been highlighted nationally on multiple occasions and earned a national award in 2023 for educational leadership and impact.

### **Empowering Indiana Parents and Increasing Quality Educational Opportunities**

- **Expanded learning options for Hoosier students and families.**
  - Continue providing support for all schools - the goal is to ensure all schools are improving and offer a quality option for parents, families, and students.
    - Traditional public schools, the greatest form of school choice in Indiana; approximately 97,500 students chose a traditional public school other than the district in which they reside.
  - Implemented the largest expansion of Choice Scholarship eligibility in state history, providing open access for parents to make the best educational decisions for their child's unique needs.

- Approximately 43,000 recipients in fall 2021 and over 75,000 in fall 2024.
- Provided implementation support for the creation of Indiana’s Education Scholarship Account (ESA) program, which empowers special education students to tailor their education experience to their unique needs.
- Implemented the first-in-the-nation Career Scholarship Accounts (CSAs) program to support students’ completion of credentials of value and quality work-based learning experiences, including modern youth apprenticeships.

### **Building a Stronger Teacher Pipeline**

- **Created a comprehensive teacher supply and demand marketplace:** The Indiana Educator Supply & Demand Marketplace is a statewide platform created by the Indiana Department of Education to modernize teacher recruitment and hiring. It serves as both a job board and a real-time data tool, connecting schools with prospective educators while also tracking vacancies and workforce needs across the state. Teachers and candidates can create profiles, explore open positions, and be matched directly with schools, while districts gain access to a larger pool of applicants and tools to streamline hiring. Beyond supporting recruitment, the marketplace provides policymakers and education leaders with timely data on teacher supply and demand, helping Indiana address shortages in high-need areas such as special education, English learner instruction, and STEM. This free tool tracks vacancies, matches teachers with open positions, and helps recruit new teachers. The average district now has access to over 2,000 new candidates.
  - To date, the majority of school corporations and charter schools have opted-in to use the full marketplace.
  - Since its launch, the educator supply and demand marketplace has been integral in helping to identify and triage high-need areas, including special education, English learner, and STEM teachers.

- **Created I-SEAL (special education), I-TELL (English learner), and I-STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) to address teacher shortages in high-need areas of expertise.**
  - I-SEAL streamlines the required coursework for teachers to earn full special education licensure. The program provides financial assistance and scholarships to educators while they complete the coursework.
    - Over 1,200 participants with more than 800 having completed.
  - I-TELL funds tuition, books, and material fees for current educators/bachelor's degree holders to complete coursework leading to English as a New Language (ENL) licensure.
    - Over 300 participants with more than 270 having completed.
  - I-STEM provides free tuition and books to eligible candidates for STEM areas. Additional stipends are also available to incentivize employment in rural districts.
    - Over 800 participants with more than 600 having completed.

### **Key Implementation and What's Next**

While getting policy right is essential, the true test of success is what happens in classrooms and communities across Indiana. Strong laws and policies create the framework, but implementation—day-to-day in schools, districts, and local partnerships—is where students and educators benefit. That is why Indiana has placed equal emphasis on implementation, building systems of support for schools and holding ourselves accountable for follow-through.

### **Early Literacy Gains: Science of Reading, Public–Private Investment, and Results**

Indiana's early literacy strategy is built on three pillars: (1) high-quality curriculum aligned to the science of reading; (2) sustained professional learning and coaching for educators; and (3) community partnership and family engagement. These efforts have been made possible by the leadership of many partners—including the teachers working tirelessly in classrooms each day, the parents and families supporting learning at home, and the community organizations helping reinforce

these skills. State leaders, along with philanthropic partners, have also provided a policy framework and critical investments that enable evidence-based reading instruction to take root and grow across Indiana.

In 2022-23, the State of Indiana and Lilly Endowment, Inc. announced a \$170 million public-private investment to accelerate this work and support science of reading instruction statewide. Building on this foundation, IDOE issued advisory lists of high-quality curricular materials (HQCM) aligned to both statute and research, while supporting districts with training, implementation tools, and monitoring for impact. Together, the dedication of educators, families, and local communities—supported by legislative action, philanthropic partnership, and department leadership—Indiana has built a strong statewide system advancing early literacy.

Results are visible in both state and national measures. On the state's IREAD assessment, Indiana achieved record gains in 2025, with 87.3% of third-graders demonstrating proficiency—a nearly 5 percentage point increase year over year. Importantly, improvements were broad-based, with increases for students from a variety of backgrounds. We will keep ensuring students receive the right supports at the right time through targeted assistance and early intervention.

Nationally, Indiana's reading performance has strengthened. In January 2025, Indiana announced that the state jumped to sixth in the nation in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reflecting sustained improvements and alignment between state assessments and rigorous national benchmarks. Not only did our highest performing students grow, as we have typically seen, our lowest performing students also grew significantly in fourth grade reading. This progress follows intensive statewide educator training and the adoption of science-of-reading-aligned materials in K-3.

Family engagement is one of the most powerful drivers of literacy growth. Research consistently shows that when families are actively involved in their child's reading journey—through daily practice at home, access to books, and conversations about learning—students make faster and more lasting progress. In Indiana, we recognize that teachers lay the literacy foundation in the classroom, and families reinforce those skills every evening around the kitchen table, in the car, or at bedtime. That's why our literacy strategy intentionally includes parents and caregivers: providing them with decodable texts, at-home practice tools, and clear, timely information about their child's progress. By empowering families with resources and knowledge, we build stronger school-home partnerships that help every child develop the confidence, fluency, and love of reading needed for lifelong success.



## **The Adolescent Literacy Gap and Indiana’s Outcomes-Based Contracting Pilot**

While early literacy is rising, adolescent literacy remains a challenge in Indiana. Data is showing some middle-grades and high-school students are still struggling to read, and the accumulated effects of interrupted learning have left too many students reading below grade level. Indiana is piloting outcomes-based contracting (OBC) to supercharge progress in middle school. Under OBC, providers are selected based on research-based evidence and receive funding upon showing clear verifiable student outcomes—such as growth on interim assessments tied to state standards or improved performance on ILEARN checkpoints and evidence-based reading and writing. Contracts include clear success metrics, transparent reporting, and independent validation. The goal is simple: urgently and strategically deploy resources where they will produce the greatest gains for students.

The pilot prioritizes students and schools with the greatest need and complements ongoing investments in teacher professional learning. Lessons from the pilot will inform statewide scale decisions in 2026 and beyond.

## **Indiana’s STEM Momentum and Landscape**

Indiana continues to expand high-quality STEM opportunities, recognizing their link to postsecondary success and workforce demand. In 2025, IDOE recognized a new cohort of STEM Certified Schools following rigorous application, review, and site visits. This recognition signals that a school has gone beyond traditional instruction to embed STEM principles across the curriculum, foster inquiry-based and project-driven learning, and create meaningful partnerships with community, industry, and higher education. Certification is not just a label; it reflects a school-wide culture of innovation, where teachers collaborate across disciplines and students are challenged to solve real-world problems. STEM Certified Schools serve as models for others, showing how to prepare students with the skills, creativity, and adaptability needed to thrive in a rapidly changing, technology-driven economy. More than 100 schools statewide now hold STEM certification, with cohorts renewed every five years. Indiana has also published vetted lists of high-quality K-12 STEM curricular materials and expanded regional support for schools pursuing certification.

Policy shifts are aligning time and talent to rigor. For example, beginning in 2026–2027, students who score above proficient in mathematics and earn a C or better will be automatically enrolled in a more advanced course the following year—an example of how Indiana is removing barriers to advanced coursework and accelerating students who are ready for the next challenge.

Indiana is partnering with philanthropy, education partners, and industry leaders to conduct a comprehensive STEM landscape analysis that will provide a clear, statewide picture of where we are and where we need to go. This analysis is designed to map existing programs, identify gaps in access and quality, and highlight promising practices already making a difference for students. By engaging schools, communities, higher education, and industry partners, the project will help Indiana determine the most strategic investments to expand high-quality STEM opportunities for all students. The goal is simple: ensure every Hoosier student has the skills, confidence, and experiences needed to thrive in a workforce and economy increasingly shaped by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

### **High School Redesign: Readiness Seals, Guaranteed Admission, and Stackable Credentials**

For more than a century, Indiana students have graduated with largely the same high school transcript—focused on courses completed, credits earned, and seat time. While that system was intended to prepare students for postsecondary opportunities, the results tell a different story.

Just over half of Hoosier graduates enroll in higher education, and fewer than half of those students complete a degree on time. Too many students leave high school without the skills needed to secure rewarding careers. Others dream of enlisting, only to discover too late that they don't meet the requirements. Student apathy is growing, reflected in rising chronic absenteeism in grades 9–12. These trends are clear: the traditional high school model is not meeting the needs of today's students or tomorrow's economy.

*Yet within these challenges lies a tremendous opportunity.* High school represents four of the most formative years in a student's life—years that should be leveraged not just to complete requirements, but to ignite a sense of purpose and prepare students for meaningful futures. Employers, colleges, and communities need graduates equipped with real skills and experiences. Students deserve a system that makes their learning valuable. That is why Indiana has taken on the bold work of high school redesign: to seamlessly pass the baton from high school to college, career training, military service, or the workforce—and to ensure every graduate leaves with a diploma that truly signals readiness for success.

In December 2024, following more than a year of input from educators, families, and community partners, the Indiana State Board of Education unanimously approved a new diploma rule. Effective

statewide with the class of 2029 (and optional beginning in 2025–2026), the diploma doubles elective flexibility and introduces transparent readiness seals for Enrollment (college), Employment (career), and Enlistment and Service (military and public service). An Honors Plus option prioritizes rigorous coursework, skill development, quality work-based learning, and tangible credentials of value.

Already, these seals are being connected to real opportunities. All seven of Indiana’s public higher education institutions now guarantee admission to applying students who earn the Enrollment Honors Plus Seal. For the Employment Honors Plus Seal, Ascend Indiana is connecting students to interviews with some of Indiana’s top employers, and trade partners such as the Central Midwest Carpenters Union are offering direct entry to apprenticeships for qualified graduates. For military-bound students, the Indiana National Guard provides access to priority job placement programs designed for military professionals, offering job interviews for federal employment and private-sector roles where military experience is highly-valued.

The new diploma also integrates a qualifications and credentials framework, allowing students to earn stackable, market-aligned credentials before graduation. To ensure alignment with workforce demand, Indiana maintains and annually updates a list of Graduation Pathways-eligible certifications and a Credentials of Value list in collaboration with business and industry leaders. The result will be more students graduating with transcribed college credit and industry-recognized credentials that transfer seamlessly into apprenticeships, two- and four-year programs, and high-demand jobs.

Indiana’s high school redesign is not simply a state initiative—it is a blueprint for what education can become nationwide. By moving beyond seat time and credit hours to readiness seals, guaranteed admissions, industry-aligned credentials, and seamless pathways, Indiana is showing how states can better prepare graduates for real opportunity. This work reflects the best of what education should be—responsive to students, aligned with community and workforce needs, and unafraid to challenge a century-old status quo. When successful, Indiana’s work will make a real difference for 1.13 million Hoosier students, and perhaps offer an approach that other states might find useful in their own efforts.

## **The K–20 Vertical: Aligning Systems and Accelerating Pathway Opportunities**

Indiana’s future depends on aligning every level of education to better serve students, families, and the state’s economy. Leaders across K–12 and higher education recognize both the daily challenges students face as they navigate their futures and the dedication of educators working tirelessly to help them succeed. The vision is simple but powerful: students should experience one seamless pathway, not a maze of disconnected systems. By uniting leadership and reducing duplication, Indiana can open doors more quickly and ensure that what students learn in elementary school connects directly to the skills they’ll need in high school, college, career training, and beyond. This is about more than systems—it is about removing barriers, creating value for families and taxpayers, and preparing every graduate for success in an increasingly competitive world.

In August 2025, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education unanimously approved my service as Commissioner of Higher Education in addition to my role as Secretary of Education. This unified K–20 vertical clarifies responsibility for outcomes across the learner journey—from foundational literacy to postsecondary attainment—and accelerates work already underway: scaling dual credit and the Indiana College Core; aligning teacher preparation to evidence-based practice in reading and math; and simplifying student transitions through guaranteed admission and transferable credentials.

## **Indiana’s Approach to Artificial Intelligence in Education**

In Indiana, we have been very intentional in leveraging AI to improve education for our students. This includes specifically focusing on student 1:1 high dosage tutoring, teacher administrative and pedagogical task support, and AI literacy for both teachers and students. Indiana is advancing AI thoughtfully, with the expectation that parents are kept fully informed and engaged every step of the way. At the same time, educators remain at the center of decision-making. With guardrails in place—privacy and data security by design, human-in-the-loop review, and strong professional learning—AI is being deployed to support teachers, not replace them.

Indiana has been intentional about leveraging AI for good—using it as a tool to expand opportunities for students and reduce burdens on educators. To help schools safely and effectively integrate AI in ways that benefit students, the Indiana Department of Education has released three rounds of grants: the 2023 AI-Powered Platform Pilot Grant, the 2024 Digital Learning Grant, and the AI-Supported Alternative Education Grant. Collectively, these opportunities have already connected more than

102,000 students and 9,000 teachers across Indiana to AI platforms in just this school year—an important step toward understanding how this technology can responsibly strengthen teaching and learning statewide.

Districts are using AI in a variety of ways. In School City of Hobart, educators piloted Khanmigo as part of the state’s first AI-Powered Platform Pilot Grant, reaching 45,000 students statewide. Some schools have leaned into literacy-focused AI tools to provide tutoring and just-in-time coaching for early readers. Others are using AI tutors for middle and high school students in math and English/language arts, where data show the greatest need. Students are also exploring creative applications—chatting with literary characters, crafting stories, navigating the college admissions process, and receiving coaching to set and pursue academic and career goals.

These innovations are proving that when implemented responsibly, AI can reduce paperwork for teachers, extend instructional time, and empower students to take greater ownership of their learning. And perhaps most importantly, it makes the experience more fun and engaging—helping students see learning not just as a requirement, but as an opportunity.

### **Indiana’s Case for ESEA Flexibility: Put Students First, Preserve Transparency, Cut Red Tape**

Indiana’s request for targeted flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) begins with a simple commitment: every decision must put students first. Too much time and too many dollars are currently tied up in duplicative reporting and compliance tasks that do little to help a child learn to read, master numeracy skills, or prepare for life after graduation. Indiana is requesting this waiver to reduce paperwork and bureaucracy so that more resources flow directly to classrooms and student support.

Our proposal keeps what matters for kids: transparent reporting on student performance that families and communities can actually use; clear identification of schools where students need more support; and fiscal oversight to ensure resources are not diverted away from students who need them most.

We are currently reviewing public comment and thoughtfully incorporating Hoosier voices into our waiver request. By elevating these local insights, we can strengthen the proposal and design a waiver that reflects both Indiana’s values and the real needs of students and families.

## **Conclusion: Building a Stronger Future for Hoosier Students**

Indiana’s education strategy is rooted in a simple but profound belief: every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. By aligning policy with practice, and by ensuring that implementation is felt in every classroom, we are working to transform that belief into reality for all 1.13 million Hoosier students.

The progress we are seeing—in early literacy gains, in expanded STEM opportunities, in redesigned high school pathways, and in a stronger educator pipeline—proves what is possible when we align vision, resources, and partnerships. From community leaders and the Indiana General Assembly to philanthropic partners, from teachers and principals to parents and employers, our state has rallied around the shared goal of preparing every graduate for success.

This work is about more than programs or initiatives—it is about preparing students to thrive in a dynamic world. By redesigning high school to maximize all four years, introducing readiness seals, and ensuring students graduate with stackable, market-aligned credentials, Indiana is creating pathways that carry real value beyond graduation. Coupled with uniting K–12 and higher education under one vision, advancing innovation, and holding ourselves accountable through transparent tools like the Indiana GPS dashboard, we are building an education system designed for today and ready for tomorrow.

Indiana will continue to celebrate progress, confront challenges honestly, and push forward with urgency. Together—with families, educators, communities, and policymakers working side by side—we can ensure that every Hoosier student leaves school prepared to succeed in employment, enrollment, or enlistment leading to service. The future of our students is the future of Indiana, and together, we must keep our foot on the gas pedal to ensure a brighter future for our students and our state.