



# Illinois State Board of Education

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## **Key Findings from Phase III of the Illinois State Board of Education Listening Tours on the Every Student Succeeds Act**

### **Report**

**January 2017**

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## Executive Summary

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), each state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education. The plan specifies how each state will address student assessment, accountability measures, and educational support strategies for student subgroups. In addition, the state plan outlines each state's intentions regarding applying for funding streams that support rural education, technology, and preschool, among other areas.

To ensure that the Illinois state plan accommodates the needs of schools and districts, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) held a series of "listening tours" in 2016. Phase I of the listening tours occurred in April and May 2016. During this first phase of local engagement, nearly 470 district superintendents, school principals, teachers, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators attended listening tours at 11 sites. At the Phase I listening tours, ISBE provided an overview of the new ESSA requirements and funding opportunities. ISBE also gathered feedback from education stakeholders about implementation of ESSA in Illinois.

ISBE used feedback from the first round of listening tours to draft an initial state plan. In September and October 2016, ISBE conducted a second round of listening tours to collect feedback on the draft plan. During this second phase, nearly 615 district superintendents, school principals, teachers, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators attended listening tours at 14 sites. ISBE incorporated feedback from the second round of listening tours into a revised draft plan. To gather feedback on the revised draft state plan, ISBE held a third round of listening tours in November and December 2016.

To ensure participation across the entire state, the Phase III listening tours were held at 8 new sites, none of which were repeated from the Phase I or Phase II listening tours. More than 315 state legislators, district superintendents, school principals, teachers, school librarians, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators participated in the Phase III listening tours.

The Midwest Comprehensive Center, a federally funded regional comprehensive center operated by American Institutes for Research, supported ISBE in documenting, analyzing, and synthesizing the stakeholder feedback from all three phases of listening tours. The findings from the Phase III listening tours will be used to inform ISBE's final revisions of the draft state plan.

This report provides information about the key findings and methodology used to synthesize feedback from the Phase III listening tours.

### Key Findings from Phase III ESSA Listening Tours

Summaries of participant comments and recommendations are provided as follows:

- In its accountability plan, ISBE should consider including a school quality indicator, prior to the eighth grade, which begins to measure whether students are on-track to high school graduation.

- If the accountability system includes a school climate survey, ISBE, districts, and schools should be cognizant of data collection challenges, including low response rates.
- ISBE should consider including advanced coursework and student engagement as school quality indicators.
- In recognition of the importance of nonacademic factors to education, while in keeping with ESSA requirements to weight academic indicators greater than school quality indicators, ISBE should consider the possibility of placing 51 percent of the accountability weight on academic indicators and 49 percent on school quality indicators, among other weighting options.
- ISBE should consider how the progress toward English language proficiency indicator, which is a required academic indicator under the ESSA regulations, disproportionately affects ratings for schools that serve high numbers of English learners.
- The college and career pathways model allows students flexibility to demonstrate postsecondary readiness. However, the pathways may not be feasible for all students, including students with disabilities or students in schools with limited academic or extracurricular offerings.
- ISBE should be wary of implementing a “growth-to-proficiency” accountability model, which can have negative impacts for students in low-income areas and high-achieving students.
- District, school, and community stakeholders applaud ISBE’s efforts to replace previous accountability ratings with more positive terminology, including ratings of “Initial,” “Growing,” “Meeting,” and “Exceeding.”
- Support for school library infrastructure and professional development provides opportunities for students to develop resource selection skills, critical thinking, and a love of learning.
- The state plan should provide opportunities to support teacher professional development, including partnerships with state universities.

## Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the support and help of many individuals and organizations. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of them.

We also would like to extend special thanks to the following schools, districts, and centers, which hosted listening tours during Phase III of the Illinois State Board of Education’s gathering of local perspectives:

- Chicago Public Schools District #299
  - Schurz High School
- Austin Town Hall<sup>1</sup>
- Jacksonville School District #117
  - Jacksonville High School
- Indian Prairie School District #204
  - Crouse Education Center
- Proviso Township High School District #209
  - Proviso Math and Science Academy
- Decatur Public School District #61
  - Eisenhower High School
- Crystal Lake School District #47
  - Bernotas Middle School
- Galesburg School District #205
  - Silas Willard Elementary School

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<sup>1</sup> Austin Town Hall is located in Chicago. To avoid confusion with Schurz High School, the listening tour session held at Austin Town Hall will be referred to as the “Austin session,” whereas the session held at Schurz High School will be referred to as the “Chicago session.”

## Introduction

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), each state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education. The plan specifies how the state will address student assessment, accountability measures, and educational support strategies for student subgroups. In addition, the plan outlines the state's intentions regarding applying for funding streams that support rural education, technology, and preschool, among other areas.

To ensure that the Illinois state plan accommodates the needs of schools and districts, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) held a series of "listening tours" in 2016. Phase I of the listening tours occurred in April and May 2016. During this first phase of local engagement, nearly 470 district superintendents, school principals, teachers, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators attended listening tours at 11 sites. At the Phase I listening tours, ISBE provided an overview of the new ESSA requirements and funding opportunities. ISBE also gathered feedback from education stakeholders about implementation of ESSA in Illinois.

ISBE used feedback from the first round of listening tours to draft an initial state plan. In September and October 2016, ISBE conducted a second round of listening tours to collect feedback on the draft plan. During this second phase, nearly 615 district superintendents, school principals, teachers, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators attended listening tours at 14 sites. ISBE incorporated feedback from the second round listening tours into a revised draft plan. The revised plan was made publicly available on the ISBE website. To gather feedback on the revised draft state plan, ISBE held a third round of listening tours in November and December 2016.

To ensure participation across the entire state, the Phase III listening tours were held at 8 new sites, none of which were repeated from the Phase I or Phase II listening tours. More than 315 state legislators, district superintendents, school principals, teachers, school librarians, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators participated in the Phase III listening tours. In total, 1,401 participants attended sessions across the three listening tour phases.

The Midwest Comprehensive Center, a federally funded regional center operated by American Institutes for Research, supported ISBE in documenting the stakeholder feedback from all three phases of listening tours. Findings from the Phase III listening tours will be used to inform ISBE's final revisions of the draft state plan.

This report provides information about the key findings and methodology used to synthesize feedback from the Phase III listening tours.

# Methodology

## Data and Sampling

The findings in this report come from a listening tour conducted at eight sites in Illinois during November and December 2016. ISBE invited its partners and stakeholders throughout Illinois to attend a listening tour session to solicit their input on the state’s draft plan, with specific questions about the new accountability system and the College and Career Ready Indicator Framework.<sup>2</sup> The listening tours were open to the public to collect feedback from as many ISBE stakeholders as possible. Attendees included state General Assembly representatives, legislative staffers, regional superintendents, district superintendents, assistant superintendents, other district administrators, school principals, assistant principals, teachers, school librarians, parents, community members, school board members, nonprofit organization staff members, and policy advocates.

To encourage conversation, ISBE developed the following guiding topics and questions:

- Accountability System Indicators
  - What is your feedback on the following school quality indicators, which have been proposed by stakeholders?
    - Chronic absenteeism
    - College and career readiness
    - Eighth-grade on-track for high school graduation
    - Ninth-grade on-track for high school graduation
    - School climate survey
    - Growth toward college and career readiness (as measured by ninth-grade on-track for high school graduation)
  - What is your feedback on weighting the academic and school quality indicators?
- Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework
  - What is your feedback on the College and Career Ready Framework, which includes the following components for a designation of being “college and career ready”?
    - Grade point average (GPA) of 2.8 out of 4.0
    - Readiness college entrance score on the SAT
    - Two or more academic benchmarks or industry credentials
    - Two or more behavioral and experiential benchmarks

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<sup>2</sup> The College and Career Ready Indicator Framework outlines academic and extracurricular goals for high school students. If a student were to meet all of the framework’s indicators, then that student would graduate with the designation of being “college and career ready.” The indicators are obtaining a GPA of 2.8 out of 4.0 or higher, achieving an SAT score that indicates college readiness (the numerical score has yet to be determined), meeting two or more specific academic/industry indicators, and meeting two or more specific behavioral/experiential indicators.

- What is your feedback on the College and Career Readiness Pathways presented at the November ISBE board meeting, which provides four alternative options for students to achieve the “college and career ready” designation?
  - Pathway A
    - Minimum total American College Test (ACT) or SAT score
    - ACT section scores:
      - English: 18
      - Math: 22
      - Reading: 22
      - Science: 23
    - SAT section scores:
      - Evidenced-Based Reading and Writing: 480
      - Math 530
  - Pathway B
    - Minimum GPA of 2.8 out of 4.0
    - One academic indicator
    - Two career indicators
  - Pathway C
    - Minimum 2.0 GPA
    - Passage of college placement exam
    - Two career indicators
  - Pathway D
    - 2.0–2.79 GPA
    - Demonstrated proficiency in Algebra II (grade of A, B, or C)
    - One additional academic indicator
    - Two career indicators
- Accountability Systems—Growth Models
  - Which approaches to student academic growth have appeal and which ones do not? Why or why not?
  - Are there additional approaches to student academic growth that stakeholders would like to see explored?
    - If so, what are the additional approaches?

- Accountability Systems—Goals
  - What is your feedback on the proposed approach to measuring interim goals?
    - The baseline will be established over three years (2017–18 through 2019–20) for each subgroup and subject within each school.
    - Then the target to 2032 will be back mapped with three-year interim goals.
    - Schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support will receive support upon identification.
- Meaningful Differentiation
  - What is your feedback on meaningfully differentiating schools?

In total, 317 people attended the listening tours (see Table 1).

Note-takers from the Midwest Comprehensive Center team attended each listening session to document and synthesize the formal testimony.

**Table 1. Listening tour dates, locations, and participants**

| Date  | Host district or organization              | Location of listening tour | Total number of participants |
|-------|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 11/28 | Chicago Public Schools District #299       | Chicago                    | 16                           |
| 11/28 | Jacksonville School District #117          | Jacksonville               | 22                           |
| 12/1  | Indian Prairie School District #204        | Aurora                     | 54                           |
| 12/5  | Proviso Township High School District #299 | Forest Park                | 54                           |
| 12/6  | Chicago Public Schools District #299       | Austin (Chicago)           | 51                           |
| 12/6  | Decatur Public School District #61         | Decatur                    | 38                           |
| 12/7  | Crystal Lake School District #47           | Crystal Lake               | 39                           |
| 12/7  | Galesburg School District #205             | Galesburg                  | 43                           |
| Total |  |                            | 317                          |

## Analyses

The Midwest Comprehensive Center team coded notes taken by the official note-taker for each listening tour session into broad topic areas aligned with the questions of interest identified by ISBE. After the coding process, researchers were able to sort the data and identify recurrent themes. The team also reviewed public comments and written testimony from listening tour participants. This report presents the key findings of feedback from stakeholders shared at the ESSA listening tours.

## Limitations

Limitations of the data provided in this report include the following:

- Participation in the listening tours was voluntary and attendees decided whether to attend an ESSA tour and whether to contribute feedback. Therefore, the responses collected may not truly represent the thoughts of Illinois education practitioners as a whole. Inferences cannot be made about larger practitioner group(s) to which attendees belong (i.e., the findings may not be generalizable).
- Listening tour analyses were conducted on notes taken by experienced note-takers, and the analysis was informed by training in qualitative coding methods from experienced coders. These notes, however, may be susceptible to note-taker and analyst biases.

## Key Findings from ESSA Listening Tours

### Accountability System—School Quality Indicators

#### Timing for On-Track to Graduation Indicators

Listening tour participants shared several thoughts about the timing for measuring whether students are on-track to graduate from high school. A nonprofit advocate in Austin expressed concern that the earliest on-track indicator under discussion is for eighth-grade students. A high school counselor at the Austin session seconded this concern, urging ISBE to consider indicators for younger students.

A gifted education advocate at the Galesburg session expressed that ISBE should address school quality throughout K–8 education because “college readiness and high achievement start early.” In addition, a participant at the Crystal Lake session asked how eighth-grade on-track status became an option. ISBE explained that eighth-grade on-track status can be backmapped from ninth-grade on-track status, another proposed school quality indicator.

#### School Climate Survey

Several listening tour attendees had questions about the school climate survey, which was mentioned as a potential school quality indicator. A social worker in Austin asked whether the school climate survey would be universal, or whether it could account for differences in student populations across districts. A participant at the Crystal Lake session seconded this question. ISBE reminded participants at each session that the school climate survey would have to be consistent statewide.

One superintendent at the Crystal Lake session wondered if the school climate survey would be offered biennially, similar to the 5Essentials Survey. ISBE clarified that under ESSA, accountability measures must be taken annually, including the school climate survey. Noting another similarity to the 5Essentials Survey, a bilingual director at the Forest Park session expressed concern about using a school climate survey as an indicator because of the potential for low response rates. To encourage response from parents, a state senator at the Forest Park session suggested administering parent surveys on school climate during report card pickup days.

## **Suspensions and Expulsions**

Some listening tour attendees had questions about the role of suspension and expulsion rates in accountability. A community organizer at the Austin session asked whether suspensions and expulsions would fall under the school climate survey because they have been strong indicators for community-based outreach. A participant at the Crystal Lake session asked whether there has been any conversation about revising suspension and expulsion rates to measure restorative justice or other “positive” efforts.

## **Other Indicators to Consider**

Listening tour attendees mentioned some other potential school quality indicators. A nonprofit organization representative at the Chicago listening tour session urged ISBE to consider including an indicator that measures the availability of advanced academic programming, including dual enrollment and Advanced Placement® (AP®)<sup>3</sup> courses. An assistant superintendent at the Crystal Lake listening tour asked about the significance of measuring chronic absenteeism, which was mentioned as a potential indicator, because districts may or may not have control over chronic absenteeism. An AdvancED representative asked whether student engagement was considered as a potential school quality indicator.

## **Accountability System—Weighting Indicators**

**Within the accountability system, 51 percent of the score comes from academic indicators and 49 percent comes from school quality indicators.**

As some listening tour attendees noted, schools that participate in the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure (IBAM) are primarily evaluated on school quality indicators. However, ESSA requires that academic indicators must carry more weight than school quality indicators in the statewide accountability system. To best preserve the spirit of evaluating a school beyond academics, some listening tour attendees advocated for a 51 percent–49 percent balance of weighting academic and school quality indicators, respectively.

A science and social studies teacher at the Chicago listening tour supported the 51 percent–49 percent split, saying that devoting the maximum possible weight to school quality indicators “shows the state does value more than reading and math.” This sentiment was seconded by a community college teacher in Chicago, who said that placing a high weight on school quality indicators “makes sure students have a lot of reasons for staying with school.” A community organizer in Austin and a superintendent in Crystal Lake also indicated support for a 51 percent–49 percent split.

An early childhood education advocate at the Austin tour noted the importance of choosing high-quality indicators.

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<sup>3</sup> Advanced Placement® and AP® are trademarks registered and/or owned by the College Board, which was not involved in the production of, and does not endorse, this product.

## **Support for other weighting of academic and school quality indicators**

Other participants suggested different weights for the accountability system indicators. A participant at the Aurora session suggested weighting each academic indicator as 25 percent of the accountability score. Because there are three academic indicators for both K–8 and 9–12 schools, this would mean that 75 percent of the accountability score is determined by academic measures and 25 percent is determined by school quality measures.

A participant at the Chicago listening tour recommended placing 70 percent of the weight on academic measures, noting that the primary role of schools is academic. A bilingual education advocate in Forest Park expressed interest in weighting the score as 60 percent academic and 40 percent school quality indicators. A state senator at the Forest Park sessions echoed this sentiment but noted that it would be important to know what the school quality indicators are before the weighting can be determined.

## **Impact of the English language proficiency indicator**

Some listening tour attendees had other questions about the effect of measuring English language proficiency for English learners (ELs). This academic indicator is required as outlined in the ESSA regulations. A participant at the Aurora listening tour asked how the accountability system would evaluate schools in which students do not take Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) to measure English language proficiency. An assistant superintendent at the Crystal Lake listening tour raised the same question. ISBE noted that the plan is not currently set, but either those schools would not be evaluated for English language proficiency or the school’s accountability would be evaluated against a smaller pool of total points.

Some attendees expressed concern that English language proficiency measures will have a disproportionately negative impact on some schools and districts. A bilingual education director at the Forest Park session asked ISBE to consider how measuring English language proficiency will impact smaller districts, noting that “an uptick in the number of ELs will have a much more profound impact on a small district’s rating than in a large district.” In addition, a superintendent at the Forest Park session noted that ELs are “double-dinged” by academic measures. The superintendent said, “We want to make sure the EL proficiency indicators only measures EL proficiency, not content knowledge—Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) will measure the content knowledge, hopefully along with test offerings in foreign languages.”

## **College and Career Readiness Measures**

### **Support for the college and career readiness pathways**

Several participants expressed support for the four college and career readiness pathways. The pathways are options that allow students to attain “college and career readiness” through a variety of benchmarks. A superintendent at the Jacksonville session indicated support for the pathways options, saying that the High School District Association has discussed the importance of including college placement and career readiness options.

Many participants supported the pathways because they allow students multiple options for success. A superintendent at the Forest Park session noted, “Sometimes students get off to a bad start—we should look at the fact that students are getting to college many different ways.” The superintendent noted that the pathways allow students to achieve their goals, even if they had a rough start in high school. Three district administrators at the Aurora session expressed support from their district staff for the pathways option. One superintendent in Aurora noted that the pathways allow students to demonstrate postsecondary readiness even if they do not achieve specific ACT or SAT scores.

However, some participants noted that the pathways might not meet all district or school needs. An assistant superintendent at the Crystal Lake session noted that her district grades students on a five-point scale, so they could not use the pathways’ GPA requirements, which are based on a four-point scale. The assistant superintendent also noted that Pathway D includes a benchmark for satisfactorily passing Algebra II. However, not all students will take Algebra II because the Illinois Learning Standards allow schools to offer Integrated Math III instead. A participant in Aurora noted that many students do not have access to the indicators needed for college and career readiness. The participant noted that as a former Chicago Public Schools teacher, her school did not offer any of the pathways’ academic options except for the ACT, and the school’s average ACT composite score was a 13, which would not meet the college and career readiness benchmark.

### **Questions about measuring college and career readiness**

Several questions arose about the college and career readiness framework and pathways options. One participant in Aurora asked about how articulated credit, or high school credit that can be applied toward postsecondary degrees, would be incorporated.

A few participants expressed concern about the role of GPA in both the framework and the pathways. A parent at the Aurora session noted that her son’s GPA does not accurately reflect his understanding; he has the academic knowledge, but he has difficulty putting it into writing for homework and assessments. Another Aurora participant noted that grades are not equally distributed across classes, schools, or districts. A curriculum director at the Austin session seconded the concern about subjectivity in grading.

Some listening tour attendees expressed support for the Illinois College and Career Ready Framework, which was also presented during the Phase II listening tours. For example, a participant in Aurora noted that the framework is a feasible option for students with disabilities, because transition programming “provides opportunities for students to meet all of the college and career readiness indicators.”

However, other attendees noted several factors that were not included in the framework. An attendance commission member at the Austin session noted that social and emotional skills, including the ability to work with others, are not included. A bilingual director at the Forest Park session inquired about whether biliteracy could be included as an indicator. A retired deputy state superintendent at the Jacksonville session noted the importance of including postsecondary institutions in conversations about college and career readiness. A teacher union representative in

Jacksonville echoed this sentiment and noted the importance of supporting students who are working toward apprenticeships or trade school.

A district administrator in Forest Park suggested starting with students who have successfully transitioned to college or careers. The administrator recommended investigating which indicators helped those students succeed, then using those indicators to create a college and career readiness framework. This approach will allow the framework to be informed by real-life student success.

One of the Forest Park participants, a district superintendent, was on the committee that developed the Illinois College and Career Ready Framework. He clarified the reasoning for some of the framework's components. For example, he noted that the 2.8 GPA requirement has an 83 percent rate of predicting college and career success. The superintendent noted that biliteracy was not included because "there is no existing research about whether biliteracy translates to college success." He noted, "The framework is meant to be a living breathing document—as more indicators are validated by research, we can add them to the framework."

## **Accountability System—Growth Models**

### **Concerns about growth-to-proficiency models**

Listening tour participants noted that a proposed "growth-to-proficiency" model could be detrimental to the success of disadvantaged students. A superintendent from the Jacksonville session noted, "A 'growth-to-proficiency' approach would perpetuate racial and economic 'excellence gaps.' This is because low-income high achievers are likely to attend high-poverty schools, which, as under NCLB, would experience pressure to raise scores for their lowest performing students, but lack incentives to serve students across the achievement continuum." A superintendent from the Forest Park session noted that the accountability model should weight growth more than proficiency because schools can play a larger role in fostering academic growth.

Some attendees also noted that growth-to-proficiency models could negatively affect high-achieving students. One teacher at the Chicago session noted that the "impact can go the other way—higher performing students hurt the model because they don't appear to grow. 1.5 years of growth is expected, but kids who max out the 12th-grade system don't show growth in the model." A gifted education advocate at the Galesburg session noted that the growth model must hold schools accountable for growth of all students, including those schools that are already designated as "proficient" in academic content. A gifted education advocate in Forest Park noted that growth of high-achieving students is hampered by the ceiling effect.

### **Growth model options**

As many attendees noted, any growth model includes the opportunity for error. A community member at the Austin session noted that growth might not be a reliable accountability indicator because some districts have very high mobility, which makes it difficult to track growth. At the same time, a superintendent at the Aurora session underscored the importance of data quality, saying "if the data is bad, even a simple system doesn't work." This concern was seconded by an

assistant superintendent in Crystal Lake, who noted, “Schools will depend on this data—if we have high error, then we’re detracting from the integrity of data for improvement.”

Several participants proposed ideas about the most effective models. A participant at the Aurora session noted, “You’re not going to get something that’s 100% accurate for using a growth model with PARCC, but having a value table<sup>4</sup> is better than nothing.” A nonprofit organization representative in Chicago expressed that a value table would be the “most user-friendly and transparent,” saying, “It allows best practices to be visible, and allows schools to make good judgements with data. Flaws in the model can be addressed with a new generation of assessments. Stronger vertical alignment up the grade levels can reduce error.”

### **Other key considerations**

Listening tour attendees shared other thoughts about measuring growth in the accountability system. A school board member in Aurora urged ISBE to keep the growth model simple and use measures that are consistent with data that districts are already measuring. An education policy institute director at the Forest Park session noted that improving growth for special populations often requires a larger investment from districts and that incentivizing districts might encourage more growth for students from low-income families, ELs, and students with disabilities.

### **Accountability System—Goals**

Attendees had several thoughts about ISBE’s plan to measure interim goals. A district administrator at the Aurora session noted that several factors affect whether schools meet their goals. The administrator noted that it is important to make sure more emphasis is placed on supporting the school’s progress on academic and school quality indicators than the summation of whether the school did or did not meet its goals. Another participant in Aurora noted concern that the public will jump to conclusions about schools that are identified for targeted or comprehensive support.

A participant in the Austin session suggested that ISBE set goals of 100 percent academic proficiency, college and career readiness, and high school graduation, as opposed to the current benchmarks of 90 percent. The participant expressed that setting the goal higher would mean that more students are encouraged to reach those goals. In contrast, some attendees expressed concern about being able to meet the current benchmarks. A superintendent at the Forest Park session noted that his district needs help and will not be able to meet the 90 percent proficiency goals until ISBE can provide adequate funding and support. A professor at the Galesburg session inquired about the basis for the 90 percent proficiency goals, considering that approximately 15 percent of Illinois students are identified as having learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or behavioral disorders.

### **Meaningful Differentiation**

Across several listening tours, participants expressed enthusiasm for the new system of differentiating schools for support. A participant at the Aurora listening tour was pleased to hear

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<sup>4</sup> Value Table establishes performance categories and awards points to individual students based on their growth between performance categories on statewide achievement tests over two years.

that the new system does not involve sanctions, but instead it provides more integrated supports for identified schools. A superintendent at the Jacksonville session noted that a more supportive accountability system provides avenues to close both opportunity and achievement gaps. A professor at the Galesburg session noted the opportunity to provide more complete support for low-performing schools.

A participant in Chicago liked the words that ISBE proposes for different categories of accountability ratings: Initial, Growing, Meeting, and Exceeding. The participant noted that a label of “Growing” is much more encouraging than being branded with a color like bright red or a numeric score. Support for the new terminology was echoed by a non-profit organization representative in Chicago and a participant in Decatur. In addition, a nonprofit organization representative in Chicago praised ISBE’s efforts to tell more complete stories about schools. The representative noted that more complete data on subgroups “will allow families, educators, and relators to have a more nuanced understanding.”

## **Other Comments**

In addition to the accountability topics described previously, listening tour participants discussed some other considerations for the state ESSA plan.

### **Need for effective school libraries**

School librarians reiterated their commitment to student success at all Phase III listening tour sessions. As noted in previous listening tours, school librarians across Illinois urged ISBE to include school libraries in the ESSA state plan. One school librarian at the Aurora listening tour noted that librarians “help connect students with the right academic resources, meet with college representatives, fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), register to vote, identify credible sources, and much more.” A school librarian at the Decatur session noted that school libraries could bridge resource gaps for students who may not have access to print or online materials outside of school. This sentiment was seconded by another librarian in Decatur, who said that research has proven “time and time again that licensed school librarians have a positive impact on student achievement.”

Participants at all sessions noted that ESSA provides several opportunities to fund school libraries. A school media library specialist at the Aurora session noted that Title I, Part A provides opportunities to fund school support personnel, including school librarians. Title II, Part B, Subpart I funding can be used to support library programs. In addition, Title II, Part B, Subpart 2 allows for funding professional development. As the specialist noted, Title II also includes the opportunity to use any subpart to support programs that foster comprehensive literacy. Title IV allows for funding of technology for school libraries. Several librarians and media specialists urged ISBE to pursue these funding streams.

### **Accommodating special populations**

As in previous listening tours, Phase III session attendees underscored the importance of considering special populations in the accountability plan. Some attendees noted the role of out-of-school factors, including family engagement and personal circumstances. A school

psychologist at the Austin session urged ISBE to include families and experts on bilingual education and special needs in stakeholder teams around accountability measures. A teacher at the Forest Park session mentioned the need to discuss and address trauma that affect students, particularly African American students. A community member in Forest Park highlighted the importance of “dealing with the whole child – if the whole child isn’t measured in our accountability system, nothing is going to change.”

A gifted education advocate at the Austin listening tour noted that some Title I funding should be used to support high-achieving students in low-income schools. This sentiment was echoed by advocates at the Chicago, Decatur, and Galesburg sessions. As noted by a teacher in Forest Park, support has a drastic effect on talented students in low-income areas. The teacher noted that only 27 percent of Illinois districts currently offer gifted and talented programs; in 2003, that rate was 85 percent. The teacher noted that low-income districts are the most likely to cut gifted and talented resources due to funding or logistical constraints. Despite challenges, many low-income districts are making great strides with their students, as noted by a participant in the Forest Park session. The participant highlighted one district’s discussions on implementing a middle school readiness model for their elementary students.

### **Teacher professional development and evaluation**

Listening tour attendees urged ISBE to consider support for teacher professional development and evaluation. A professor at the Galesburg listening tour highlighted the possibility of partnering with state universities to prepare teachers for changing instructional expectations. The professor noted that this partnership could include support for both preservice and in-service teachers, particularly teachers in schools that are close to universities. A teacher union president in Decatur noted that it is difficult to fill teacher positions and urged ISBE to provide incentives to keep teachers in Illinois.

As noted by three teachers in Austin, professional development offerings often do not align with teacher evaluation protocol. One teacher at the Austin session noted that teacher evaluations are often used for punitive purposes rather than for identifying areas of improvement for future professional development.

### **Questions about the new federal administration**

Listening tour attendees in Chicago, Forest Park, Galesburg, and Jacksonville posed questions about the effects of the changing federal administration. A superintendent at the Galesburg listening tour noted that if the ESSA accountability requirements were changed, then he would like to see Illinois use the IBAM model instead. An Illinois Center for School Improvement representative at the Jacksonville listening tour inquired about whether the final ESSA regulations will affect the timeline of finalizing and submitting the Illinois state plan. ISBE is currently planning to submit its state plan to the U.S. Department of Education in April, which is the earliest submission deadline. April submission would allow the state, schools, and districts the maximum time possible to prepare and implement the state plan.

## Summary

Practitioners, administrators, teachers, parents, advocates, and community members provided valuable feedback on the second draft of the Illinois ESSA state plan.

Participants across sessions discussed the possibility of including various school quality indicators previously identified by stakeholders, including a school climate survey, suspension and expulsion rates, and on-track to graduation indicators. In addition, some attendees mentioned the possibility of using other indicators, including presence of advanced course options and student engagement.

Noting that IBAM places more weight on school quality indicators than academic ones, many listening tour participants expressed interest in substantially weighting school quality indicators in the ESSA accountability plan. Although ESSA requires more weight to be placed on academic indicators, attendees noted the importance of allowing school quality indicators to tell a well-rounded story about each school. Some attendees advocated for a 51 percent/49 percent split in weighting academic and school quality indicators; other attendees advocated for 60 percent/40 percent or 70 percent/30 percent splits.

Many attendees expressed support for the college and career readiness pathways that were proposed at the November board meeting. Attendees noted that the pathways allow students multiple options to demonstrate readiness, depending on individual strengths and school offerings. However, some participants noted that it might be difficult to measure certain pathway indicators; for example, a district that uses a five-point grading scale would need to adjust the GPA indicator.

Additionally, participants noted the importance of including support for school libraries, accommodating special populations of students, providing teacher preparation and professional development opportunities, and considering the potential impacts of the new federal administration.

A summary of the key points and recommendations raised by listening tour participants, which ISBE should consider in revising its draft ESSA plan, is presented next:

- In its accountability plan, ISBE should consider including a school quality indicator, prior to the eighth grade, which begins to measure whether students are on-track to high school graduation.
- If the accountability system includes a school climate survey, then ISBE, districts, and schools should be cognizant of data collection challenges, including low response rates.
- ISBE should consider including advanced coursework and student engagement as school quality indicators.
- In recognition of the importance of nonacademic factors to education, while in keeping with ESSA requirements to weight academic indicators greater than school quality indicators, ISBE should consider the possibility of placing 51 percent of the accountability weight on academic indicators and 49 percent on school quality indicators, among other weighting options.

- ISBE should consider how the progress toward English language proficiency indicator, which is a required academic indicator under the ESSA regulations, disproportionately affects ratings for schools that serve high numbers of ELs.
- The college and career pathways model allows students flexibility to demonstrate postsecondary readiness. However, the pathways may not be feasible for all students, including students with disabilities or students in schools with limited academic or extracurricular offerings.
- ISBE should be wary of implementing a “growth-to-proficiency” accountability model, which can have negative impacts for students in low-income areas and high-achieving students.
- District, school, and community stakeholders applaud ISBE’s efforts to replace previous accountability ratings with more positive terminology, including ratings of “Initial,” “Growing,” “Meeting,” and “Exceeding.”
- Support for school library infrastructure and professional development provides opportunities for students to develop resource selection skills, critical thinking, and a love of learning.
- The state plan should provide opportunities to support teacher professional development, including partnerships with state universities.

### **Next Steps (January-April)**

First, ISBE will incorporate comments and finalize the Illinois ESSA State Plan. Next, the Governor will have 30 days to review and provide feedback. Then, on March 15<sup>th</sup>, the Board will approve. Finally, the Plan will be submitted to the Department of Education on April 3, 2017.