



# Illinois State Board of Education

James T. Meeks, Chairman

Tony Smith, Ph.D., State Superintendent

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

### **Report**

**October 2016**

# Contents

	<b>Page</b>
Executive Summary .....	1
Key Findings From ESSA Listening Tours .....	1
Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Methodology .....	5
Data and Sampling.....	5
Analyses .....	7
Limitations .....	7
Key Findings From ESSA Listening Tours .....	8
Illinois College and Career Ready Framework.....	8
Accountability Systems for Students .....	9
Student Assessment .....	13
Identification of Low-Performing Schools for Support.....	13
Support for Educators .....	14
Well-Rounded and Supportive Education for All Schools.....	14
Summary .....	16

## Executive Summary

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), each state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education. The plan must specify how the state will address student assessment, accountability measures, and educational support strategies for student subgroups. In addition, the state plan will outline the state's intention to apply 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 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.

The Midwest Comprehensive Center, a federally funded regional comprehensive center operated by American Institutes for Research, supported ISBE in documenting and synthesizing the stakeholder feedback from both phases of listening tours.

### Key Findings from Phase II ESSA Listening Tours

Summaries of participant comments and recommendations are provided below:

- While the Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework is designed for statewide implementation, ISBE should consider that students' opportunities to achieve college and career readiness indicators will vary across schools and districts.
- The College and Career Ready Indicator Framework should adequately measure career readiness skills, aligned with industry needs and separate from college readiness skills.
- Student growth should be given a significant weight in the statewide accountability plan. Growth allows schools and districts to more meaningfully demonstrate their impacts on student learning. Proficiency measures do not account for factors outside of the school's control as well as growth measures, nor capture student progress at all ability levels (above or well-below the proficiency cut score).
- The statewide accountability plan must include realistic benchmarks for disadvantaged student populations, including English learners and students in special education programs.
- ISBE should consider aligning the ESSA accountability plan with the existing Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure (IBAM) system.
- While ISBE reiterated the statutory requirement for a statewide accountability plan, the state should consider opportunities for local flexibility.
- Adequate time should be allotted to the attainment of interim and long-term goals for achievement, graduation rates and English language proficiency.
- To accurately assess English learners' content mastery, the state must develop native language assessments of academic content understanding.

- Addressing funding inequities is crucial for reducing academic disparities across districts.
- ESSA provides opportunities to support students’ social and emotional needs through Title I funding.
- Parent involvement is a key component of student success, and ISBE should consider opportunities for increased parent roles in state education decision-making.
- ISBE must consider including the arts and civic education when defining a “well-rounded education.”
- ISBE should consider new opportunities under ESSA to support high-achieving students through Title I funding to expand gifted programs and provide appropriate professional development for teachers through Title II programs.

## Acknowledgements

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 districts and associations, which hosted listening tours during Phase II of the Illinois State Board of Education's gathering of local perspectives:

- Freeport School District 145
- Moline–Coal Valley School District 40
- Hall High School District 502 (Spring Valley)
- Bloomington School District 87
- Mundelein High School District 120
- Carbondale Community High School District 165
- Effingham Community Unit School District 40
- Quincy Public School District 172
- Peoria School District 150
- Lockport Township High School District 205
- East St. Louis School District 189
- Chicago Public School District 299
- School District U-46 (Schaumburg)
- DeKalb County Farm Bureau (Sycamore)

## Introduction

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), each state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education. The plan must specify how the state will address student assessment, accountability measures, and educational support strategies for student subgroups. In addition, the state plan will outline 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 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. To ensure participation across the entire state, the Phase II listening tours were held at 15 new sites, none of which were repeated from the Phase I listening tours. More than 610 state legislators, district superintendents, school principals, teachers, school librarians, policy advocates, parents, community members, and other administrators participated in the Phase II listening tours.

Each Phase II listening tour was preceded by an informational pre-session specifically for Illinois state legislators. The pre-sessions allowed legislators to ask questions and learn more about the ESSA statute and the Illinois draft state plan.

The Midwest Comprehensive Center, a federally funded regional comprehensive center operated by American Institutes for Research, supported ISBE in documenting the stakeholder feedback from both phases of listening tours.

Findings from the Phase II listening tours will be used to inform ISBE's revision of the draft state plan. ISBE plans to hold a third round of listening tours in November and December 2016. During this round, ISBE will collect feedback on the revised state plan, which will incorporate feedback from the second round of listening tours.

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

# Methodology

## Data and Sampling

The findings in this report come from a listening tour conducted at 15 sites in Illinois during September and October 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 addressing new ESSA accountability requirements and the College and Career Ready Indicator Framework.<sup>1</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:

- Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework
  - ISBE adopted a new college and career framework at its September 2016 board meeting. ISBE requested feedback on the structure and substance of the framework.

**Note:** The College and Career Ready Framework was adopted while the Phase II listening tours were in progress. Because some listening tours occurred before the framework’s adoption, attendees were not asked about the framework at the listening tours in Freeport, Moline, Spring Valley, Bloomington, and Mundelein.

- Accountability Systems

To illustrate the ESSA accountability plan requirements, ISBE presented two examples of potential accountability systems for elementary schools and two examples for high schools. ESSA requires accountability systems to include indicators for academic achievement, progress towards English language proficiency, growth or another valid and reliable statewide academic measure (for grades K–8 only), graduation rate (for high schools only), and an additional indicator of school quality or student success. ISBE asked participants the following questions:

- When considering the examples presented, what comments, questions, or other ideas could assist ISBE in the development of its accountability system (e.g., different possibilities of indicators and/or weighting)?
- What should the relationship be between long-term goals that are ambitious and achievable and long-term goals that are aspirational?
- Should the interim goal be set every 2 or 3 years?

---

<sup>1</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, 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 should the time frame be for measuring long-term goals?
  - One idea is to measure long-term goals in 6–10 years, given that long-term change in a school requires at least 5 years.
  - Another idea is that long-term goals should be measured in 11–15 years, because this would allow interventions to be evaluated from kindergarten to high school graduation.
- How should Illinois define “growth”?
- What are other ways to define “achievement”?
- How might a system avoid the “bubble syndrome,” which is a focus on students who are most likely to meet standards instead of those who need additional supports or who are at the higher end of the spectrum?
- What is necessary in order to create a system wherein students can be identified as part of multiple subgroups?
- What is necessary in order to develop a system that addresses disparities in state, local, and federal funding and resources?
- What needs to occur in order to ensure that schools are able to provide an accurate story to the public?
- What other data should be included in a reporting system but not in the accountability system?
- Identification of Low-Performing Schools for Support
  - What are the most appropriate ways to identify schools for comprehensive or targeted support?
  - What indicators should be considered when exiting schools from comprehensive and targeted support?
- Support for Educators
  - What are additional ways in which Title II funds may be used to improve the skills of teachers, principals, or other school leaders in identifying students with specific learning needs?
- Well-Rounded and Supportive Education for All Students
  - What constraints have prevented districts from using and/or braiding and blending federal funds to carry out innovative ways to support students?
  - Are there any additional suggestions for ways in which ISBE can use Title IV, Part A, funds?

In total, 614 people attended the listening tours (see Table 1).

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

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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Host District/Organization</b>	<b>Location of Listening Tour</b>	<b>Total Number of Participants</b>
9/6	Freeport School District 145	Freeport	26
9/7	Moline–Coal Valley School District #40	Moline	26
9/8	Hall High School District 502	Spring Valley	15
9/13	Bloomington School District 87	Bloomington	56
9/15	Mundelein High School District 120	Mundelein	48
9/19	Carbondale Community High School District 165	Carbondale	31
9/20	Effingham Community Unit School District 40	Effingham	38
9/21	Quincy Public School District 172	Quincy	13
9/22	Peoria School District 150	Peoria	53
9/26	Lockport Township High School District 205	Lockport	35
9/27	East St. Louis SD 189	East St. Louis	35
9/27	Chicago Public School District 299	Chicago	89
9/28	School District U–46	Schaumburg	74
10/5	DeKalb County Farm Bureau	Sycamore	75
<b>Total</b>			<b>614</b>

## **Analyses**

The MWCC 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. Some notes were also coded into an additional subtheme, Student Assessment, as this new subtheme emerged. 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 entirely voluntary and attendees decided whether to contribute feedback. Therefore, the responses collected may not truly represent the thoughts of Illinois education practitioners as a whole. Inferences about larger

practitioner group(s) to which attendees belong cannot be made (i.e., findings may not be generalizable).

- The Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework was developed as the ESSA listening tours took place. After its development, ISBE solicited feedback on the framework, beginning with the Carbondale session. However, as attendees were previously unfamiliar with the framework, feedback may not completely represent the thoughts of the attendees or Illinois education practitioners who are more familiar with the framework.
- 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

### Illinois College and Career Ready Framework

Beginning with the listening tour in Carbondale, ISBE presented the new Illinois College and Career Ready Framework for attendee feedback. The framework includes four student indicators:

- GPA of 2.8 out of 4.0 or higher
- Attainment of a “college readiness” entrance score on the SAT
- Two or more academic or industry benchmarks, which may include:
  - An industry credential (e.g., ASE certification for auto mechanics)
  - Participation in a dual credit/career pathway course
  - Score of 3 or higher on an Advanced Placement<sup>®</sup> (AP<sup>®</sup>)<sup>2</sup> exam
  - Score of 4 or higher on an International Baccalaureate exam
  - Grade of A, B, or C in an Advanced Placement course
  - Grade of A, B, or C in a dual credit English or math course
  - Grade of A, B, or C in Algebra II
- Two or more behavioral or experiential benchmarks, which may include:
  - Attendance rate of 90% or higher
  - Completion of 25 hours of community or military service
  - Participation in a workplace learning experience
  - Participation in two or more organized co-curricular activities, including language and fine arts

---

<sup>2</sup> Advanced Placement<sup>®</sup> and AP<sup>®</sup> are trademarks registered and/or owned by the College Board, which was not involved in the production of, and does not endorse, this product.

If a student were to meet these four performance criteria, the student would attain the designation of “college and career ready.” Listening tour participants shared their input and concerns about the College and Career Ready Indicator Framework.

### **Consider students’ opportunities to achieve the framework benchmarks**

Some listening tour attendees had questions about students’ ability to achieve the college and career ready benchmarks. Participants noted that not all students have the same opportunities to work towards college and career ready indicators. For example, a teacher at the East St. Louis listening tour session noted that students in rural communities might have limited pathways for attaining the “college and career ready” designation because AP<sup>®</sup> courses, dual credit offerings, or other academic indicators might not be available in their districts.

### **Ensure that the framework accurately assesses career readiness**

Some participants also raised concerns about whether the framework’s indicators accurately assess a student’s readiness for college or career entry. In particular, attendees shared thoughts about the importance of emphasizing career readiness. An ISBE board member at the Carbondale listening tour noted that career and technical education (CTE) often is not treated with the same respect as college preparatory education. A teacher association advocate at the Quincy listening tour remarked that the state plan needs to support students who choose to pursue CTE training and coursework. A superintendent at the Effingham listening tour noted that career readiness skills are different from college readiness skills and argued that the two should, therefore, be measured separately. A school board member from the Quincy session seconded this sentiment, saying the phrase “college and career readiness” places the emphasis on college, even though some students may not be working towards college. To support career readiness, a school administrator at the Schaumburg session noted that policymakers need to connect with business leaders and community members to find out what skills are needed for career readiness across the state.

### **Questions about the GPA requirement**

Several attendees had questions about the framework’s 2.8 grade point average (GPA) requirement. ISBE explained that the GPA is based on an indicator in the national Redefining Readiness framework (Redefining Ready, 2016), which addresses both college and career readiness. However, attendees noted some concerns about the utility of GPA as an indicator. A teacher at the Effingham listening tour observed that the 2.8 GPA may not reflect a student’s proficiency with specific college or career readiness skills. One principal at the Effingham listening tour noted that some students at his school might be career ready independent of whether or not they attain a 2.8 GPA. The principal shared an example of a student who does not have a high GPA, is a highly proficient welder, and has been very successful at the local vocational center.

### **Accountability Systems for Students**

To illustrate the ESSA accountability plan requirements, ISBE presented two examples of potential accountability systems for elementary schools and two examples for high schools.

ESSA requires accountability systems to include indicators for academic achievement, progress towards English language proficiency, growth or another valid and reliable statewide academic measure (for grades K–8 only), graduation rate (for high schools only), and an additional indicator school quality or student success.

After seeing the examples, participants shared thoughts on what should be included in the Illinois ESSA accountability plan.

### **Include student growth as a meaningful accountability indicator**

Attendees at several listening tours indicated the importance of emphasizing student growth over achievement in the accountability system. As one teacher at the Bloomington listening tour explained, even strong teachers often have difficulty moving students towards proficiency benchmarks, because their students come into school with differing levels of prior knowledge and engagement at home. The teacher noted that growth is a much more realistic indicator because teachers have more control over a student’s growth than overall achievement. In addition, a community member at the Chicago session noted that proficiency measures often neglect to account for disparities in school resources and challenges. A curriculum and instruction director at the Peoria listening tour noted that the state’s 90 percent benchmarks for reading proficiency, math proficiency, on-track to graduation, and college and career readiness are not necessarily attainable for all schools and suggested there should be some consideration of progress toward the goals along with attainment. This concern was echoed by an assistant superintendent at the Schaumburg listening tour.

To account for growth and positive progress, one teacher at the Freeport session recommended that ISBE consider measuring a student’s academic starting point at the beginning of the year and the student’s gains by the end of the year rather than heavily focusing on proficiency status. Attendees at all listening tours echoed the call for growth measures in order to more accurately describe student and school progress.

### **Include appropriate accountability measures for disadvantaged student populations**

Several attendees raised questions about how the state’s accountability system will consider disadvantaged student populations. Participants noted the importance of including realistic and meaningful benchmarks for students in special education. A special education director at the Quincy listening tour noted that special education covers a variety of learning environments ranging from self-contained accommodations to residential treatment programs. One parent in East St. Louis asked the state to consider separating test scores and benchmarks for special education students from those for general education students. A special education teacher at the Moline tour indicated that growth should be strongly emphasized in accountability for special education students, given that these students often would not meet achievement benchmarks.

Attendees also noted the importance of accommodating English learners. A teacher at the Moline listening tour explained that achievement targets for refugee and immigrant students are difficult to meet because these students are adjusting to changes both inside and outside of school. A participant at the Moline listening tour raised a question about the “cut point” for determining adequate English language proficiency. To support English learners, a district superintendent at

the Schaumburg session cited the importance of not exiting English learners from language support until after the full 4-year maximum period, rather than exiting students earlier.

### **Consider local experiences with graduation rates and on-track indicators**

Some participants noted that local contexts play a substantial role in accountability measures and reporting. For example, some districts face external factors that affect their graduation rates. A superintendent at the Carbondale listening tour noted that her district has a declining population, meaning that there are fewer seniors than freshmen in the high school. A school board member at the Mundelein session noted that graduation rates are the district's primary focus because the district only includes high schools. A superintendent at the Effingham session echoed the emphasis on graduation rates. One superintendent at the East St. Louis tour noted that on-track indicators are crucial for improving graduation rates. The superintendent noted that ISBE should consider including 10th grade on-track indicators in addition to 8th/9th grade indicators, citing his district's experience that being on track in 10th grade significantly increases the likelihood of graduation.

### **Align the accountability plan with the Illinois Balanced Assessment Measure (IBAM)**

Participants expressed interest in aligning the ESSA accountability plan with the Illinois Balanced Assessment Measure (IBAM), the state accountability system developed in 2015. A participant at the Bloomington listening tour noted that IBAM uses data that schools and districts are already collecting rather than requiring separate data collection. The participant urged ISBE not to add to school and district workloads. This sentiment was seconded by a superintendent at the Schaumburg session. The Bloomington session participant also noted that IBAM currently weights non-academic indicators at 70 percent of the accountability score and academic indicators at 30 percent. The participant noted that ESSA requires greater weight on the academic indicators, but cautioned against academic measures that only capture a single data point (e.g., one-time test scores). A superintendent at the Effingham session noted that it is unclear how to best weight the academic and non-academic indicators in the ESSA accountability plan.

### **ESSA requires a statewide accountability plan, but there is interest in local flexibility**

ISBE presenters reiterated that the state plan's accountability system must be consistent across all schools and districts statewide; however, some attendees expressed interest in retaining local control over accountability measures. For example, a district superintendent at the Moline session expressed a desire for autonomy over which accountability measures are used. Another participant at the Moline session indicated that "high levels of regulation mean we can't even think about innovation. When there are higher levels of accountability and compliance measures, creativity goes downhill."

Participants identified some opportunities for flexibility within the existing ESSA parameters. A school board member at the Quincy listening session said that the statute's inclusion of non-academic indicators may allow for more input on accountability from local school boards. A school board member at the Peoria session asked ISBE to "allow schools to tell their story and demonstrate their knowledge without comparing them [to other schools]."

## **Include the arts in the accountability system**

Some attendees noted the importance of including accountability measures to gauge opportunities in the arts. An art teacher at the Chicago listening tour noted that “student access to arts education” should be included as part of the accountability system. A participant at the Lockport session seconded this sentiment, noting that an accountability measure would prevent schools from limiting their music and arts curricula.

## **Consider including school library quality as an accountability indicator**

School librarians across all listening tours advocated for the inclusion of two school library measures in the state’s accountability system:

- The presence of at least one certified licensed librarian
- The presence of an effective school library, which includes up-to-date technology and print resources

One school librarian at the Bloomington listening tour stated, “Libraries contribute to the success of students both during their school years and beyond...[and] an effective school library program prepares students for living in an information-rich society and directly impacts every student’s ability to succeed.” A school librarian in Moline noted that “school libraries provide the media-rich environment that allows students to meet the Illinois state learning standards.” This sentiment was echoed by school librarians at all listening tours. School librarians in Freeport, East St. Louis, and Peoria noted that school libraries often are the only exposure that students have to digital resources and print reference materials.

School librarians also expressed interest in opportunities to use Title I funding to support school libraries. A school librarian at the Bloomington listening tour noted that ESSA offers Title I funding for librarians’ education and professional development. A school librarian at the East St. Louis session asked ISBE to consider using Title I funding to support collaboration between school librarians and content area teachers.

## **Adequate time should be allotted for interim and long-term goal measurement windows**

ISBE requested input on the timeline for measuring interim and long-term accountability goals. The state’s accountability workgroup suggested setting interim goals at either 2 or 3 year increments. The workgroup was divided on the timeframe for long-term goals. Some members advocated for measuring long-term goals after 6–10 years, indicating that long-term change takes at least 5 years. Other members advocated for measuring long-term goals after 11–15 years, arguing that the longer window allows interventions to start with kindergarten and follow students through high school graduation. A superintendent at the Effingham listening tour indicated that it will take some time for schools to reach the state’s 90 percent proficiency targets and that a long-term measurement of 7–10 years might be appropriate. A school board member at the Quincy listening tour indicated that it will take at least 3 years to assess progress toward short-term goals, and that the window for long-term goals should be refined as ISBE and districts learn more about ESSA regulations. ISBE noted that regardless of the goal measurement windows, the state is required to revisit the state plan and gather stakeholder feedback every 4 years under ESSA.

## **Student Assessment**

Attendees across listening tours shared thoughts on native language assessments and the current standardized tests offered in Illinois, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers exam (PARCC) and the SAT.

### **Develop native language assessments to accurately gauge English learners' content mastery**

Several attendees called for the development of statewide academic assessments in the state's most commonly spoken languages beyond English. A multilingual association president at the Schaumburg listening tour spoke of the importance of developing multilingual statewide assessments in mathematics and English language arts in order to accurately measure the content mastery of English learners. This sentiment was seconded by a principal at the Sycamore listening tour who noted that native language assessments are necessary "to compare apples to apples" in terms of achievement. Participants at the Lockport, Schaumburg, and Chicago listening tours emphasized the need for Spanish language assessments in particular.

### **Consider the usefulness of the current Illinois standardized tests**

Some attendees expressed concerns about the utility of the PARCC assessments, which are currently being implemented for students in grades 3–8, and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which will be implemented for high school students beginning in the 2016–17 school year. A district administrator at the Quincy session noted that the SAT does not include usable growth measures and that it is therefore difficult to use SAT to track growth. Several attendees across listening tours expressed dissatisfaction with PARCC describing PARCC as unreliable and unhelpful for measuring student progress.

Some participants indicated that the current standardized statewide tests may contradict state improvement and equity efforts. An assistant superintendent at the Schaumburg session explained that the SAT is intended to produce a bell curve of scores, which is not consistent with the state's goal of having 90 percent of students meet achievement benchmarks. In addition, some attendees noted that current testing could reinforce inequity across the state. For example, one attendee at the Chicago listening tour observed the "strong correlation" between district resources and test scores.

### **Identification of Low-Performing Schools for Support**

Attendees discussed the importance of providing and sustaining rich supports for schools. An attendee at the Sycamore listening tour expressed interest in allowing schools to conduct their own needs assessments and to request support accordingly. At the Peoria listening tour, a professional learning director noted the draft plan's inclusion of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). The director expressed interest in a system similar to MTSS, in which professional learning is differentiated for teachers, support staff, and administrators. A data analyst at the Sycamore session asked about sustaining school progress after exiting from comprehensive or targeted support status.

## **Support for Educators**

Attendees noted several opportunities under ESSA to support educators through licensing, professional development, and revised evaluations. An English learner education coordinator at the Lockport listening tour called for ISBE to stop factoring student assessment scores into teacher and administrator evaluations. The coordinator noted that because assessments are conducted in English, student performance may not accurately reflect instruction quality or content mastery for English learners. A superintendent at the Schaumburg session noted that the state needs to invest in teacher certification, recruitment, and retention. A professional learning director at the Peoria session called for professional development that aligns to Learning Forward standards (Standards for Professional Learning, 2016), provides job-embedded learning opportunities, and has continued benefits even when funding is no longer available.

## **Well-Rounded and Supportive Education for All Schools**

Participants shared several ideas to provide students with a comprehensive and supportive education. Some participants highlighted funding opportunities to support a variety of student populations. In addition, attendees noted opportunities to bolster education through parent involvement and social-emotional learning.

### **Addressing funding inequities is a top priority**

At multiple listening tours, attendees expressed concerns about school-level funding for special student populations. As a superintendent at the Schaumburg listening tour noted, “There are 16 references to equity in the Illinois ESSA state plan, but we live in the state that has the worst funding equity in the nation. We need to create funding equity to have academic equity.” A state representative at the Moline listening tour cited statewide disparities in funding, which often leave Title I districts, schools, and teachers at a serious disadvantage. A school board member at the Mundelein session discussed the need for funding flexibility at the district level to accommodate population shifts in districts, such as increased populations of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

Some attendees shared ideas to reduce the effects of funding gaps on student learning. A union member at the Chicago listening tour noted that accountability measures and assessments should put more weight on factors that schools can control rather than factors that may be affected by poverty (e.g., participation in extracurricular activities or standardized test scores). A community representative at the Chicago session noted that student assessments should be tied to growth to promote equity.

Participants shared several ideas for using Title I funds under the new statute. School librarians at each listening tour noted the opportunity to use Title II and Title III funding to support school library materials, librarian certification and professional development, and collaboration between school librarians and content area teachers. A community member at the East St. Louis listening tour called for ISBE to use Title I funding to expand programs and provide early intervention for children aged 0–5, which was seconded by a parent representative at the Schaumburg session.

## **Use funding to support students' social and emotional needs**

Several participants expressed interest in social, emotional, and health supports for students. An alternative school director at the Peoria session noted the importance of social and emotional support, saying, “We’re losing the battle if we do not consider the social and emotional component in addressing the whole child.” A parent at the Chicago session noted that trauma, behavioral health, and mental health must be addressed before students can learn. A teacher at the Chicago session seconded this sentiment, emphasizing that educators cannot expect students to demonstrate academic proficiency when they are dealing with trauma outside of school. A community representative at the Schaumburg session noted that the state could use Title II funding to support professional development around students’ social and emotional needs.

## **Parent involvement is critical for student success**

Parents were well represented at several listening tours, and they advocated for ISBE to include parents in decision-making. One parent from the East St. Louis session noted that parents in her community want to be involved, but they often do not feel included by ISBE. Likewise, another parent at the East St. Louis tour noted that parents need to be open to cooperating with district and state administrators. A parent advocate at the Schaumburg listening tour observed that “parent engagement is critical for student success.” Parents at the East St. Louis and Schaumburg sessions asked ISBE to create a statewide parent advisory council that involves parents in the state’s policy development and implementation.

Administrators acknowledged the importance of parent involvement as well. For example, a former school board president at the Spring Valley session noted that “parents play a major role in student success—if [administrators] can’t convince parents to be invested, we can’t do much to improve achievement.” Along with parent involvement, support for families is a critical piece of education. As one parent organization member observed at the Chicago listening tour, “The reason health and wellness in schools is such an important issue for parents is simple. Healthier children are better able to learn and thrive.” A regional superintendent at the Peoria listening tour noted that ESSA provides an opportunity to “support kids and address the needs of families.”

## **Include civic education as part of the “well rounded” definition**

Several attendees described the importance of providing civic education to all students. A foundation advocate at the Chicago session noted that “students deserve opportunities to learn and practice civic engagement...developing students' civic identity is an important part of educating the whole child.” A community member at the Chicago listening tour indicated that civics education should begin in middle school and should be a yearlong standalone course. An education foundation representative at the Sycamore listening tour expressed interest in a civics requirement for high school students beyond the existing test on the U.S. Constitution.

## **ESSA provides an opportunity to support gifted and high-achieving students**

Some attendees noted the importance of providing appropriate education for high-achieving learners. A gifted programming coordinator at the Schaumburg listening tour explained that only 9 percent of Illinois districts have existing policies for accelerated coursework such as Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate coursework, dual or concurrent coursework or early

college, thus leaving behind students who progress at a quick pace. A retired administrator at the Schaumburg session stated that “students with high potential have been neglected during No Child Left Behind” and that ESSA provides an opportunity to more adequately serve high-achieving students. A gifted education advocate at the Sycamore listening tour noted that gifted students’ progress is not accurately reflected in current measures because the proficiency measure ceilings are often set too low. A gifted education advocate at the Peoria listening tour observed that ESSA provides an opportunity to “reverse the decline of gifted education in the state and [to] fully develop talents of thousands of learners.” The advocate recommended using Title I funding to monitor and report student growth, and using Title II funding to support teacher and district capacity to serve high-achieving students. Interest in supporting gifted education through Title funding was echoed by participants at the Schaumburg and Sycamore sessions.

## Summary

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

Stakeholders noted the importance of accurately measuring career readiness within the Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework. As several attendees noted, career readiness skills often differ from college readiness skills, and the state must recognize the differences to adequately prepare all students for success after high school.

Participants called for growth as a significant indicator in the statewide accountability system. Although students may not start at or reach the same level of proficiency, growth can account for positive progress due to teacher, school, and district interventions more meaningfully than proficiency. Participants also urged ISBE to include attainable and meaningful accountability measures for special populations, including students in special education programs, English learners, and high-achieving students.

As in the first round of listening tours, participants expressed thoughts on supporting the whole child. Participants advocated for increased social and emotional support, arts education, civics education, and parent involvement. In addition, participants noted several opportunities to use Title II funding for teacher training and student support, including funds for gifted education, school librarian certification, and teacher professional development.

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 below:

- While the Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator Framework is designed for statewide implementation, ISBE should consider that students’ opportunities to achieve college and career readiness indicators will vary across schools and districts.
- The College and Career Ready Indicator Framework should adequately measure career readiness skills aligned with industry needs and separate from college readiness skills.
- Student growth should be given a significant weight in the statewide accountability plan. Growth allows schools and districts to more meaningfully demonstrate their impacts on

student learning. Proficiency measures do not account for factors outside of the school's control as well as growth measures, nor capture student progress at all ability levels (above or well-below the proficiency cut score).

- The statewide accountability plan must include realistic benchmarks for disadvantaged student populations, including English learners and students in special education programs.
- ISBE should consider aligning the ESSA accountability plan with the existing Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure (IBAM) system.
- ISBE should balance the statutory requirement for a statewide accountability plan with opportunities for local flexibility.
- Adequate time should be allotted to the attainment of interim and long-term goals for achievement, graduation rates and English language proficiency.
- To accurately assess English learners' content mastery, the state must develop native language assessments of academic content understanding.
- Addressing funding inequities is crucial for reducing academic disparities across districts.
- ESSA provides opportunities to support students' social and emotional needs through Title I funding.
- Parent involvement is a key component of student success and ISBE should consider opportunities for increased parent roles in state education decision-making.
- ISBE must consider including the arts and civic education when defining a "well-rounded education."
- ISBE should consider new opportunities under ESSA to support high-achieving students through Title I funding to expand gifted programs and provide appropriate professional development for teachers through Title II programs.

## References

Learning Forward The Professional Learning Association. *Standards for Professional Learning*. (2016). Retrieved from [https://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning?\\_sm\\_au\\_=iVV2j0kPjv1kS7nk](https://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning?_sm_au_=iVV2j0kPjv1kS7nk)

National College and Career Readiness Indicator. *Redefining Ready*. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.isbe.net/ISFRC/default.htm>