

To: Dr. Carmen Ayala, State Superintendent
Mr. Darren Reisberg, Chairman
Members of the IL State Board of Education

From: Aimee Galvin, Policy and Government Affairs Manager

Cc: Mimi Rodman, Executive Director
Jessica Handy, Government Affairs Director

Date: May 22, 2019

Re: Support and Accountability Listening Tour Comments

Stand for Children Illinois has been an active participant in the state's ESSA plan and we applaud ISBE for their open and collaborative process. We are strong proponents of the final plan and commend ISBE for maintaining a focus on growth and commitment to equity. In fact, we created a video to celebrate the state's work on our blog, "[A Better Recipe](http://stand.org/illinois/blog/2017/09/28/better-recipe)"¹. We are grateful for this opportunity to voice our support and provide additional feedback for this iterative process.

Weights and Indicators

We advocated for a plan that would place greater weight on growth within academic indicators than student success indicators. Faced with the challenge that student success indicators are simply proxies for poverty, the agency found an appropriate balance to help ensure that the state's accountability system does not simply mirror a school's poverty status. Academic indicators account for 75% of a school's score, recognizing grade-level proficiency in key subjects while also greatly rewarding growth, focusing on schools' progress improving student scores and closing achievement gaps.

However, the state still lacks a weighted high school growth measure. We appreciate the Board's work to bring PSAT to ninth and tenth graders to enable a statewide growth model at the high school level. Proficiency sets an all or nothing bar for student achievement while growth serves as a powerful metric for determining how much students learn while attending a particular school. Measuring high school growth using the PSAT and SAT assessments will allow Illinois to better determine how much a student learns throughout their high school career. We hope this measure can help alleviate the heavy reliance on graduation rates so that the high school system can strike a better balance among its multiple measures.

¹ <http://stand.org/illinois/blog/2017/09/28/better-recipe>

We would also like to highlight both the College and Career Readiness (CCR) indicator and the 9th Grade On-Track indicator as valuable additions to the state plan. The 9th Grade On-Track indicator is a research-based metric schools can use to identify struggling students and provide appropriate supports in order to ensure student success. Collecting this data point and rewarding schools for early interventions helps schools prioritize some of their most vulnerable students. Additionally, the CCR indicator emphasizes two key parts of the state's Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act (PWR): the College and Career Pathway Endorsements and career exploration as mapped out in the PaCE Framework. Rewarding schools for embracing these two features of the PWR act builds on the work the state is doing around Perkins V and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to better align our students with the high-skill, high-wage jobs of tomorrow. We also believe that there is an opportunity to further utilize the CCR indicator as a tool to measure the State's goal that 90% of high school graduates be college and career ready. This would be a more holistic metric than is the current single test score.

Designations

During statewide ESSA planning discussions Stand for Children consistently championed designations that would be accessible and helpful to parents. This meant creating designation categories that would immediately convey a school's standing to communities without lengthy explanations or definitions. The final designations, Exemplary, Commendable, Underperforming, and Lowest-performing, achieve this goal. In a survey to Stand members over 70% of respondents said the designations helped them compare schools and several respondents found the designations useful when considering attendance or relocation decisions. Clearly, the designations have proved to be a helpful tool for parents. Over 60% of respondents reported that the designation aligned with their opinion of the school with slightly less than a quarter believing the designation was better than the school deserved and only 12% believing the designation was worse than the school deserved.

Additional comments from Stand for Children's statewide survey of members:

"Very important [especially] for new homeowners and transfers. Helped change our kids minds on neighborhood." -Stand member, Homer Glen

"In Springfield, there was a lot of excitement that one of the low-income elementary schools that has poured a lot of work into family engagement and home visits got the highest score. Using multiple measures has helped bring out these distinctions. I think it has been less helpful in drawing these out for the high schools here." -Stand member, Springfield

"When I see at my son's JR high received underperforming, I was not surprised given the fact that 3 years ago the principal basically threw up her hands at the physical violence and sent out an email that altercations were going to be handled by calling the police. I bet if you pulled the records of how many times the police were called to that school in school year 2015-2016 it was unbelievable; I know my son witnessed 3 times students being escorted out of the building in handcuffs. The next school year [there was a] new principal as [the] prior one was promoted to district level administrator for secondary schools in our district and then this school year [they] hired on a restorative justice coordinator for that building. Also districts artificially manipulate destinations by having SPED programs in certain buildings across their districts, so that is another item to consider. At [my son's school] the SPED classrooms were down one hallway so

that was not a good sign of inclusion although they talked a good game.” -Stand member, Montgomery

Pairing this most recent feedback with previous conversations with Stand members from across the state we still support the number and names of the summative designations. The four categories are easy to understand while still providing valuable information to parents about their quality of their local schools.

Furthermore, we appreciate ISBE’s dedication to equity by prohibiting any school with consistently underperforming subgroups from achieving an exemplary or commendable designation. This commitment to all students will incentivize schools to close achievement gaps by ensuring all students have the resources they need to be academically successful. One piece of feedback we have heard is that schools with enough population to comprise a subgroup are at a disadvantage because of this rule, while those without enough students to make up a reportable subgroup do not have to face the possibility of a failing subgroup. However, we stand by the decision to ensure that subgroup performance counts. We believe that the state’s definition of “consistently underperforming” sets a low bar because the definition focuses only on groups performing at the bottom 5% of the state. A smaller n-size for subgroups could help level this playing field so more subgroups would be reflected, but we also understand the rationale for an n-size of 20 to ensure a large enough sample size.

Once again, we thank ISBE for hosting the Support and Accountability Listening Tour in order to solicit community and stakeholder feedback on this important process and commend ISBE for upholding equity as a guiding principle for the state’s accountability plan.