

# INDIANA

## Overview

Passed in 1999, Public Law 221 (P.L. 221) established Indiana’s accountability system for K-12 education. The Hoosier State has continued to tweak and improve the system for over a decade since, most recently through 2010 legislation that restructured the accountability framework to adhere to an A-to-F grading scale for school classification (similar to Florida’s system), among other changes.

Indiana premises its accountability system on the notion that, by focusing on progress and providing educators and administrators with diagnostic and monitoring tools, it can induce schools to improve learning outcomes for students. To that end, the state education department provides school districts with a number of optional diagnostic and formative assessments to measure student progress.

At the same time, the state’s focus on using data to drive improvement means that only the very worst schools face any consequences and interventions—and only after many years. Interventions exist only for schools that persistently rank in the lowest performance category; no improvement actions are required of any other schools, and no accountability measures are required of districts. This may be a reasonable course of action for Indiana—after all, state education departments are limited in their capacity to intervene and intervene *well*—but it is significant tradeoff nonetheless.

Below, we map Indiana’s progress against six key components of strong state accountability systems.

### ***1) Adoption of demanding, clear, and specific standards in all core content areas, and rigorous assessment of those standards***

Indiana recently adopted the Common Core standards in reading and math and uses the Indiana Academic Standards in all other subjects. The standards are considered well developed and rigorous.<sup>55</sup> To measure student progress, the Hoosier state administers the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus (ISTEP+) assessments in reading and math in grades three through eight, as well as science in grades four and six, and social studies in grades five and seven.

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<sup>55</sup> In reviews by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Indiana received an A-minus for its U.S. History standards in 2011 and an A-minus for its science standards in 2012. The Common Core standards for reading and math, which Indiana adopted in 2010, earn grades of B-plus and A-minus, respectively. See *The State of State U.S. History Standards 2011*, *The State of State Science Standards 2012*, and *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010*, at [www.standards.educationgadfly.net/](http://www.standards.educationgadfly.net/).

ISTEP+ also includes high school end-of-course assessments for students completing Algebra I, Biology I, or English 10.

Indiana would do well to improve the rigor of its assessments. While many states establish lower cut scores of proficiency, Indiana's cut scores for eighth-grade reading and fourth- and eighth-grade math all equate to the *basic* level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP); worse, its fourth-grade reading cut score equates to NAEP's *below basic* level.<sup>56</sup>

## **2) Reporting of accessible and actionable data to all stakeholders, including summative outcome data and other formative data to drive continuous improvement**

Indiana fares moderately well on this component. The state presents information on school and district performance through an easy-to-navigate database called the DOE Compass. The database includes information on proficiency rates, graduation rates, dropout rates, AP/IB passing rates, SAT/ACT scores, and AYP data. Unfortunately, the state does not disaggregate any data by subgroup (outside of the AYP data, which only include subgroup proficiency rates), and it only displays student performance by proficiency rate instead of also by performance level.

The state does, however, allow parents direct online access to their children's data, including longitudinal results. Further, Indiana reports a measure of growth known as the Indiana Growth Model. The growth model evaluates individual-student growth relative to peers with similar academic histories, and classifies student growth into three bands:

- **High Growth** – 66th to the 99th percentile
- **Typical Growth** – 35th to the 65th percentile
- **Low Growth** – 1st to the 34th percentile

For school and district reporting purposes, the median student growth percentile in a school or district represents that entity's growth.

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<sup>56</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *Mapping State Proficiency Standards Onto the NAEP Scales: Variation and Change in State Standards for Reading and Mathematics, 2005–2009* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, August 2011), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011458>. For reading and math, the state plans to participate in new Common Core assessments beginning in the 2014-15 school year, as it is a governing state in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

### *3) Annual determinations and designations for each school and district that meaningfully differentiate their performance*

Indiana's state board of education approved a new metric in November 2011 by which the state will now evaluate schools and districts. While Indiana's previous metric included both state-required and federal AYP measures, the new metric exorcizes all federal measures.

Elementary and middle schools evaluations are now based on proficiency, growth, and assessment participation rates. Schools receive preliminary scores based on their proficiency rates; those scores can be raised if the lowest performing quartile or the remaining 75 percent of students show high growth, as measured by the Indiana growth model. The preliminary scores can also be lowered if a certain percentage of all students show low growth, or if assessment participation rates are low.

High schools are evaluated based on student performance on end-of-course assessments in English 10 and Algebra I, graduation rates, and post-secondary readiness indicators—including AP/IB passing rates, college credit attainment, and industry certification. All three areas are added together to form a final score. Schools receive preliminary assessment scores based on the percentage of students passing the end-of-course assessments; those scores can be raised or lowered depending on student progress from eighth to tenth grade, and from tenth grade to graduation. Schools also receive preliminary graduation scores based on four-year graduation rates—which can be raised or lowered depending on the number of honors and waiver diplomas<sup>57</sup> issued by the school, and by five-year graduation rates.

Based on these measures, Indiana assigns school ratings on an A-to-F scale:

- A (Exemplary Progress)
- B (Commendable Progress)
- C (Academic Progress)
- D (Academic Watch – Priority)
- F (Academic Probation – High Priority)

Districts are also scored according to the same metric, and are categorized by the same five performance designations.

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<sup>57</sup> A student who does not meet graduation exam requirements may graduate with a waiver diploma if he passes all required courses, demonstrates to the satisfaction of his school that he has met the performance bar set by the state graduation exam, or completes an internship and workforce readiness assessment.

Indiana's removal of AYP in its accountability metric means that traditional subgroups of students are no longer incorporated into the accountability system. As one state representative explained, by focusing on the lowest-performing quartile of students, the state aims to target low performers regardless of race or disability.

#### ***4) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the school and district levels***

##### Rewards

District representatives indicate that the greatest incentive for school improvement is the state's designation system and the accountability requirements tied to different labels. Beyond the school ranking system, Indiana has two incentive programs of note, one of which entails financial rewards:

- **Four Star Schools Awards** – The Four Star Schools Award recognizes schools making AYP that also rank in the state's top 25 percent of schools based on ISTEP+ results in reading and mathematics in all grades tested. Winning schools are recognized through various press releases and are featured on the state department of education's website.
- **Graduation Rate Incentive Award** – This new award program buttresses the state's focus on increasing graduation rates. The program is competitive and open to all Indiana public high schools. Monetary rewards go to the twelve public high schools with the greatest increases in graduation rates between the previous two school years: ten mid-to-large schools (more than three hundred students) receive \$20,000 awards, and two small schools (fewer than three hundred students) receive \$10,000 awards. The building principal and district superintendent of each winning school receive the funds and may distribute the cash awards to staff members whose work was critical to achieving the graduation-rate increases. The principal may receive no more than \$5,000 of the award amount.

##### Sanctions

Indiana's system for intervening in low-performing schools is relatively light on details and relies heavily on the resolve of the state and local boards of education. To begin, the state only holds schools accountable for performance; districts, no matter their performance designations, face no sanctions. The only schools that face state sanctions are those that repeatedly continue to earn F grades. For the first few years a school earns Fs, the system primarily requires local school boards to help create and implement improvement plans. The local school board can request that the state board of education appoint an outside team to manage the

school or assist in developing a new improvement plan, but it is not required to do so.

Not until years four, five, and six do the requirements become more prescriptive. At this stage, the state board appoints an expert team to rework the school's improvement plan and recommend changes. The expert team must include representatives from the community or region that the school serves. According to a representative of the state department of education, this requirement is intended to engage the community in holding schools accountable for meeting student learning needs.

If a school is still on academic probation in year six, the state board is required to conduct a hearing and consider testimony on options such as closing the school, merging the school with another school, or assigning a third-party Turnaround School Operator to run all or part of the school. Other options, including continued revision of the improvement plan, are also on the table.

As such, Indiana's accountability system only addresses its lowest-performing schools, and allows them to languish in low-performance for years before taking any significant actions—and even then, it provides avenues through which schools can avoid those drastic interventions. Thus far, however, the state board of education has proven steadfast in its resolve and not opted for the easy way out (improvement-plan stasis). The 2011-12 school year marks the first year that schools could have earned F grades for six years running, and seven schools did so. Of those seven, the board chose the turnaround option for five schools and a slightly less intensive option for the remaining two schools. Of course, it remains to be seen whether the turnarounds will work or if the board will opt for closure or school merges—presumably even more severe options—in the future.<sup>58</sup>

### Supports

As its relatively sparse outline of sanctions demonstrates, the Hoosier State's accountability system aims to drive improvement through progress monitoring and support, not through mandated interventions. On that side of the coin, Indiana provides its schools with a full kit of diagnostic and assessment tools to support local improvement efforts. See *Diagnostic and Assessment Tools* for a partial list of these tools made available by the state (some are required and some are optional).

One superintendent described how such tools support local school improvement efforts: “With the data from [diagnostic assessments], we’ve seen our buildings

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<sup>58</sup> A state representative noted that the state is working to expand the outline of sanctions for schools earning both Ds and Fs, instead of just Fs; to eliminate the weaker options allowed for schools in year six; and to establish an outline for district accountability.

## Diagnostic and Assessment Tools

**IREAD-3** - The purpose of the Indiana Reading Evaluation And Determination (IREAD-3) assessment is to measure foundational reading standards. Based on the Indiana Academic Standards, IREAD-3 is a summative assessment that evaluates reading skills of third-grade students to ensure that all students can read proficiently before moving on to fourth grade. IREAD-3 is administered in addition to ISTEP+ and provides timely information in order to plan for summer intervention if needed, as well as for decisions relative to fourth-grade placements. IREAD-3 is mandatory.

**mCLASS** - The purpose of the mCLASS assessments is to provide diagnostic measures for K-2 students in literacy and numeracy. These assessments help identify students' foundational skills and provide teachers with instructional suggestions based on student performance on benchmark assessments and regular progress monitoring. These assessments are optional.

**Acuity (3-8 and Algebra)** - The purpose of the Acuity assessments is to provide diagnostic measures for students in grades three through eight in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, as well as for students in Algebra I. Assessment reports provide standards-aligned performance data, which support educators' ability to inform instruction. These assessments are optional.

make real gains...Because the state provides these resources it saves us expense at the local level... It's a big help.”

### ***5) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the individual student level***

Indiana requires that high school students pass end-of-course assessments in English 10 and Algebra I in order to graduate. In addition, beginning in spring 2012, all third-grade students will be required to pass the IREAD-3 assessment in order to be promoted to fourth grade (a similar requirement exists in Florida).

Like all states, federal NCLB regulations require Indiana to allow students in low-performing schools to attend other, high-performing schools. According to a state representative, however, because Indiana's low-performing schools are primarily

clustered in Indianapolis and Gary, few high-performing options exist for students in failing schools; the state does not enforce or encourage this option in any meaningful way. On the bright side, Indiana recently introduced a voucher program for students statewide. While the program is an option for low-income students, and not specifically those in low-performing *schools*, the overlap of those groups means that the program will in practice allow many students in low-performing schools to attend other private schools.

### ***6) A system of rewards and consequences to drive improvement at the individual teacher and administrator level***

In its 2011 legislative session, Indiana passed a landmark law requiring local districts to develop annual teacher and principal evaluations. The evaluations must be “significantly” informed by student achievement and growth measures and must differentiate performance across four categories: highly effective, effective, improvement necessary, or ineffective.

Principals will continue to be employed under one-year contracts. For teachers, districts must now incorporate evaluation results into their compensation structures and employment decisions. New teachers will automatically fall into a “probationary” category, and can be dismissed after just one ineffective rating. They are also eligible for “established” status, akin to receiving tenure, after earning three effective or highly effective ratings in a five-year period. Established teachers cannot be dismissed unless they receive two consecutive ineffective ratings, or three ineffective or “improvement necessary” ratings over a five-year period.

Indiana also recently introduced a competitive Excellence in Performance Award to provide districts with grants for establishing bonus programs for effective and highly effective teachers. To apply, districts must outline their new evaluation metrics and describe the expected impact of the bonus program on teacher recruitment, development, and retention.

### ***What are the strengths and limitations of Indiana’s accountability system?***

#### *Strengths*

**Strong academic standards.** Indiana’s content standards are rated among the best in the nation. The state routinely uses national-level content experts to develop and review its academic standards. The state also annually tests in all four key content areas—reading, math, science, and social studies.

**Robust accountability metric.** By combining measures of proficiency, growth, and college and career readiness, Indiana captures a detailed picture of student, school, and district performance. It also disaggregates the lowest-performing quartile of students to ensure that schools and districts are held to account for those students' performance. In addition, the A-to-F grading scale for schools and districts is straightforward and easily understood by policymakers, parents, and community members.

**A full toolkit of instruments to monitor student progress.** The state's investment in diagnostic and progress monitoring tools to support the work of school improvement is key. Educators can access data that pinpoint individual-student learning needs, and building administrators have tools and resources to monitor progress toward success on summative assessments. The state has also embraced the use of technology; for example, parents have direct online access to their students' data, including longitudinal results.

**Teacher evaluation system that informs salary and employment decisions.** Indiana's new teacher (and principal) evaluation legislation revamps the state's traditional salary structure and requires evaluations to include student performance and growth indicators. Further, the state actively encourages districts to adopt model systems by offering competitive grants for teacher bonuses.

### Limitations

**Limited system of consequences.** While it measures district performance, Indiana's accountability structure ties no supports, sanctions, or interventions to district results. The system only meaningfully addresses those schools designated as the lowest performing for multiple years. While the state has clearly invested in progress-monitoring tools to support improvement efforts, its accountability system could benefit from a wider range of interventions and greater urgency in implementing those strategies with low-performing schools.

### **Final Word**

Indiana's focus on growth and progress monitoring appears to be its greatest asset. Still, the system rests on the assumption that simply giving districts the data and diagnostic tools to track and monitor progress can spur academic improvement. Perhaps. But the interventions for low performers must be robust and the implementation swift. In Indiana, the choice of state-level interventions is limited, and the powers that be could choose to implement the weakest available option. If

interventions are to be targeted to the most egregious cases, state leaders must be vigilant and bold in their prescriptions.

Information on Indiana's education-accountability system was primarily drawn from interviews with state representatives, district representatives, and local stakeholders, as well as from the Indiana Department of Education website at [www.doe.in.gov](http://www.doe.in.gov). Additional information was drawn from the National Council on Teacher Quality's *2011 State Teacher Policy Yearbook*.