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## School Governance Issues and Decisions Loom for the 2020-21 School Year

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Many of you would agree with me that the most overused word in our vocabulary currently is the word “unprecedented”—yet that term appropriately describes our circumstances. Commendations to school board members, administrators, teachers, parents, and students for the monumental efforts you have demonstrated in navigating and meeting the challenges of completing the 2019-20 school year in these *unprecedented* times!

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery of high-quality K-12 educational services has been tested like most of us have never witnessed or experienced. School board meetings have moved to a virtual setting for essential business. Millions of school breakfast and lunch meals have been distributed to students and families across Indiana since mid-March. The digital divide has been mitigated by creativity with expanded Wi-Fi hotspots, distribution of devices, increased reliance on learning management systems, and e-learning instructional tools. However, most impressive has been the passion and dedication by teachers to support the more than 1 million Hoosier students in our schools. Congratulations to all K-12 teachers for being named “The **Indiana Teacher of the Year**” by the Indiana Department of Education on Tuesday.

While some decisions remain about such things as graduation ceremonies, use of school facilities, and the best format for summer school, much attention is now being turned to planning for the re-opening of schools during the 2020-21 school year. I have been meeting with other leaders from K-12 education management associations that include IAPSS, IASBO, IASP, IUSA, ISRSA, and the Coalition of Growing and Suburban Schools to discuss what we are collectively hearing from our members. (cont’d on page 2)

During these weekly meetings we have developed a short list of policy recommendations for school re-entry that we support. In turn, we have initiated conversations with officials from the executive and legislative branches of state government to discuss this list:

## **Policy Considerations for Re-Opening Schools for the 2020-21 School Year**

- **Support local-control decisions regarding the start of the 2020-21 school year and managing the school calendar** in consultation with the local health department and following the ongoing guidance from the ISDH and CDC.
- **Fund school corporations for student participation in virtual or online learning at 100 percent** (rather than 85 percent). School corporations will likely be required to offer some level of remote and/or e-learning to continue teaching and learning during the next school year in the ongoing response to the pandemic.
- **Provide a hold harmless on the Fall 2020 ADM count using the Spring (February) 2020 count, to safeguard against abnormal enrollment or attendance patterns likely to occur next school year.** Undoubtedly, it is reasonable to expect waves of enrollment fluctuations with delayed student entry/enrollment, withdrawals, and transfers, as well as blended learning, demands for e-learning only, etc.
- **Eliminate the Grade 10 ISTEP+ /GQE immediately and replace it with the SAT and graduation requirement provisions of the graduation pathways.** Use the estimated net savings of \$32 million over four years to put back in Education Fund distributions to support teaching and learning in the classroom.
- **Support the health and public safety measures issued by the State Department of Health in response to the IDOE medical, health, and safety checklist submitted in early May.**
- **Add school corporations to the list of participants in the free PPE Marketplace offered by the state for small businesses and non-profit organizations.** Alternatively, establish a program for central purchasing of additional low-cost PPE and building cleaning supplies to be distributed when schools reopen.
- **Extend** (*upon termination of the public health emergency declaration by Governor Holcomb*) **the present Open Door Law flexibility provided to board members regarding in person vs. remote attendance for school board meetings, if an in-person quorum is established.** Mandatory in-person attendance for participation by some board members who are in vulnerable demographic groups or have pre-existing health conditions puts them at an increased health risk during the pandemic.

In addition, this group submitted a joint letter [HERE](#) to the governor on May 13, 2020, to request expanded civil liability immunity for school corporations, governing bodies, and staff, during the pandemic. Are there other statewide policy solutions that you would suggest? Please email me at: [tspradlin@isba-ind.org](mailto:tspradlin@isba-ind.org) to share your recommendations.