



Introducing Vision 2030

Fulfilling the Promise of Public Education in Illinois

By Kimberly A. Small, J.D.

Vision 2030, a collaborative effort to set a vision for public education in Illinois was introduced at the Joint Annual Conference and to IASB members in November and December 2024.

The Illinois Association of School Boards and our members, along with our colleagues at the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), Illinois Association of School Business Officials (Illinois ASBO), Illinois Principals Association (IPA), Association of Illinois Rural and Small Schools, and Illinois Association of Regional School Superintendents (IARSS), plus the Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education (IAASE) and the Superintendents' Commission for the Study of Demographics and Diversity (SCSDD), worked to develop this blueprint for K-12 public education over the next decade.

Vision 2030 represents the second time education stakeholders fostered collaboration and unity among education organizations across the state to create an advocacy framework for public education in Illinois. The first initiative, Vision 2020, resulted in numerous achievements, including the passage of the Evidence-Based Funding Formula, Illinois Balanced Accountability Model, and Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Act.

What is Vision 2030?

Vision 2030 provides a blueprint to enhance public education through future-focused learning with shared accountability and predictable funding. This includes keeping students and schools safe, attracting and retaining high-quality educators, enhancing post-secondary success, and more effectively measuring what is working well in schools in a timely, usable manner.

Future-focused learning is about reshaping our schools and classrooms and redefining student success to reflect and prepare students for all the different ways the world and economy continue to change. We have to acknowledge that students learn best, and educators teach most effectively, when they feel safe and connected to one another and to their communities. This is the single most important thing we can do to support both academic achievement and individual well-being — and it is something that must be considered in our instructional approach, curriculum, student support services, and funding, so that local districts have the resources needed to ensure school buildings are safe. This also means engaging students in thinking about their pathways to college and career sooner — as early as elementary

school (grades K-5), we must encourage and preserve time and financial resources for local curriculum innovation and programming to best meet the needs of students in our communities and, in alignment with ISBE's strategic plan, focus on providing support for local school districts to develop new approaches to attract and retain excellent educators who have both the subject-matter expertise, compassion, cultural competency and commitment to help all students at all levels achieve their full potential.

Shared accountability means thinking beyond annual standardized tests to more fairly and effectively measure student success by considering both growth and proficiency over time. This requires some shifts in how we think about student assessments. Just like children's physical growth, academic progress does not always happen linearly — both growth and proficiency should be measured over time within and across grade levels. We need to put individual, classroom, and school assessment data into the hands of educators and school leaders in near real-time. Timely insights from benchmark assessments — even if drawn from unofficial data — can be a powerful tool to inform teaching strategies and academic

interventions at both classroom and individual student levels. Assessments must be meaningful and relevant — this means identifying and considering all the things that matter to a student’s success in the elementary grades, as well as early indicators of college and career readiness in middle school. And, school ratings should be established based on clear performance thresholds rather than rankings that can pit schools within the same district against one another. Rather than focusing on which schools make it into the top 10%, let’s focus on publicly recognizing all schools that achieve high levels of student achievement at or above grade level — positive reinforcement that is powerful in improving educator morale, parent engagement, and community support.

Providing excellent education resources and future-focused learning opportunities for student success requires **long-term predictable and sustainable funding** with additional investment to support updated instructional resources and technology, keep pace with economic pressures on salaries and equipment, and maintain aging infrastructure. School districts also need the flexibility to determine how to allocate public monies to best meet the needs of their students and communities. This means that Illinois must consistently fulfill its promise of allocating a minimum of \$350 million in annual Evidence-Based Funding. Critical investments in health and life safety projects should not be subject to limitation by property tax caps or require ISBE approval. We need to rethink the current levy structure to allow schools to prioritize student and staff safety, and address these urgent needs without impacting educational funding.

The Illinois pension system for public school educators needs reform. We know that changes to the current pension model must occur; at the same time it is not effective or realistic to divert local school district resources away from schools and students to shoulder this responsibility.

More than one-half (58 of 102) of Illinois school districts are located in counties that have successfully passed a School Facility Sales Tax and school districts deserve this option if they wish to pursue it — and should have the flexibility to use these dollars not just for capital projects, but also to support school safety and mental health initiatives.

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The **vision** of the Illinois Association of School Boards is excellence in local school board governance supporting quality public education.

The **mission** of the Illinois Association of School Boards is to *Light the Way* for its members by developing their competence and confidence through a robust toolkit designed to build excellence in local school board governance, including

- Premier training experiences;
- Networking opportunities for mutual support;
- Valuable benefits, pooled services, information, and expertise;
- Advocacy on behalf of public education; and
- A platform for a strong collective voice on common interests and concerns.

What School Boards Can Do Now

Please help fulfill the promise of public education in Illinois by placing a board resolution in support of Vision 2030 on the agenda for action at a public meeting of your board of education early in 2025. A decade ago, our ability to demonstrate state-wide support for Vision 2020, with over 90% of Illinois school boards passing a similar resolution, was critical to our ability to generate legislative support for our successful effort to pass the Evidence-Based Funding formula. Vision 2020 included enhancements to teacher recruitment policies, college and career readiness initiatives, and development of the Illinois Balanced Accountability System, which establishes standards for K-12 student performance and school improvement in Illinois.

In 2025, IASB and Vision 2030 will be sharing additional resources that you can use to inform your parents, staff, and community, as well as others in your personal and professional network, about Vision 2030 and your district's support of ensuring excellence in public K-12 education for all Illinois students and schools.

Thank you for your support. Please feel free to reach out to the IASB Governmental Relations team if you have questions or need additional information. ■

Kimberly A. Small, J.D., is the Executive Director of the Illinois Association of School Boards. Resources associated with this column, including the Vision 2030 Overview, the full Vision 2030 Policy Brief, and a sample Board Resolution and talking points, can be accessed via iasb.com/Journal, or directly at IllinoisVision2030.com.

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