



MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Recommendations from Teach Plus Indiana Policy Fellows for a More Comprehensive and Equitable Accountability Framework for Indiana's Schools

Who We Are

As Teach Plus Policy Fellows and highly effective teachers who work in diverse classrooms across Indiana, we are focused on leveraging authentic teacher leadership to transform student outcomes. Since its inception, Teach Plus has partnered with teacher leaders like us to bring evidence-based solutions and our classroom expertise to the table in order to address the most critical challenges affecting students, educators, and our community at large.

In support of this vital mission, in this brief we explore data-driven best practices from across the country and propose key metrics for an updated, teacher-informed, student-centered accountability framework for Indiana schools. It is our hope that the re-establishment of a comprehensive school accountability framework that meets all of our students' needs will help drive continuous improvement for our schools and districts and ensure every student in our state has access to a high-quality education.

Introduction to School Accountability in Indiana

Since 2019, Indiana schools have not received official accountability grades, operating instead under a "held harmless" status. This has created a gap in transparency, limiting educators, families, and communities from fully understanding school performance and progress. It is worth noting that the previous model,^{1 2} which focused narrowly on standardized test scores, attendance, and graduation rates, provided an incomplete picture and failed to capture the complex, multifaceted work happening daily in schools. As a result, it also fell short in giving parents and community members clear, meaningful information to gauge a school's success and make informed decisions about their children's educational choices.

Leveraging the robust data already available through the [Indiana Department of Education's GPS Dashboard](#),³ in this memo we introduce a research-informed accountability framework that provides a more comprehensive and actionable view of school quality. While the **current accountability framework** focuses on a limited set of indicators—**student performance, individual growth, reduced achievement gaps, college and career readiness pass rates, and graduation rates**—our **proposed framework builds upon the previous framework and expands how we measure success**. The new framework retains the essential academic indicators of the previous A-F grading model but adds additional critical criteria to better reflect individual student experiences, progress toward goals, and school impact. Specifically, our **proposed framework** includes:

Current Accountability Framework via Indiana Code	Proposed Framework for State Accountability (orange text indicates changes)
Student performance	Student performance
Individual student growth	Individual student growth
Reduced achievement gaps	Reduced achievement gaps
College and Career Readiness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CCR pass rates - Graduation rates 	College and Career Readiness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CCR participation rates - CCR pass rates - Graduation rates
	Chronic Absenteeism rate
	Suspension & Expulsion rate
	Strength of Diploma
	Postsecondary Outcomes
	Teacher Retention Rate

In addition, we identify **other valuable metrics** that should be collected and publicly reported—though not factored into school grades—including parent and community engagement, access to mental health services, per-pupil expenditures (instructional and non-instructional), educator professional development hours, and facility conditions.

Comparing the Frameworks

Current Framework ⁴ (set in administrative code ⁵ by state board)		Proposed Framework (orange text indicates changes)		Rationale
Metric	Details	Metric	Details	
Student performance	% passing English/Language Arts and Math assessments	Student performance	% students passing English/Language Arts and Math assessments	Indicates the quality of instruction and curriculum alignment. Evidence has demonstrated that high-performing students in core subjects are more likely to achieve long-term success, as these skills correlate with higher earning potential and societal contributions. ⁶
Individual student growth	School receives points based on % of students catching up, keeping up, and moving up	Individual student growth	% of students catching up, keeping up, and moving up	Reflects the school's effectiveness in supporting diverse learners and meeting individual student needs. Studies have highlighted that growth-focused metrics provide a more equitable way to measure teacher and school impact, particularly in underserved populations. ⁷

<p>Reduced achievement gaps</p>	<p>School cannot receive an “A” unless it has shown that it has reduced achievement gaps in each subgroup:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Economically disadvantaged students (free & reduced lunch) + Major racial & ethnic groups + Students with disabilities + Students with limited English proficiency <p>In one of these ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Meet annual measurable objectives in each subgroup + Show improvement in performance in each subgroup from the previous year to current year + Show improvement in growth in each subgroup from the previous year to current year 	<p>Reduced achievement gaps</p>	<p>School receives points for reduced achievement gaps of subgroups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Economically disadvantaged students (free & reduced lunch) + Major racial & ethnic groups + Students with disabilities + Students with limited English proficiency <p>In one of these ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Meet annual measurable objectives in each subgroup + Show improvement in performance in each subgroup from the previous year to current year 	<p>Measures progress in closing disparities.</p> <p>Education experts have argued that addressing the "education debt" is essential for equity and long-term societal improvement.⁸</p>
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			+ Show improvement in growth in each subgroup from the previous year to current year	
College and Career Readiness	<p>% of 12th graders who graduate from high school and have taken steps to be college and career ready, measured by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + College and career readiness: percentage of graduates completing activities that are connected to being more prepared for college and/or careers (passing or earning IB, AP, dual credit, industry certification) + Graduation rate (four-year and graduation rate improvement (increase from four-year to five-year graduation rate) 	College and Career Readiness	<p>% of 12th graders who graduate from high school and have taken steps to be college and career ready, measured by:</p> <p>College and career readiness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Percentage of graduates participating in activities that are connected to being more prepared for college and/or careers (IB, AP, dual credit, industry certification, other CTE opportunities such as apprenticeships) 	<p>CCR participation and passing rates: Demonstrates college readiness and academic rigor. Adding participation encourages schools to broaden access to these opportunities. The College Board found that students who perform well in AP courses have higher college retention and graduation rates, underscoring the value of access to advanced coursework.⁹</p> <p>Graduation rates: Reflects support systems and student retention. A Harvard University study linked high school graduation with better economic and health outcomes, arguing that it is a critical indicator of school effectiveness.¹⁰</p>

			<p>+ Percentage of graduates completing activities that are connected to being more prepared for college and/or careers (passing or earning IB, AP, dual credit, industry certification)</p> <p>Graduation rate</p> <p>+ (four-year) and graduation rate improvement (increase from four-year to five-year graduation rate)</p>	
		<p>Chronic absenteeism rate</p>	<p>% students missing 10% or more of school days (as reported on the Federal Report Card on the Indiana GPS).¹¹ 12</p>	<p>Reflects success in addressing attendance barriers. Chang & Romero (2008) found that chronic absenteeism is a predictor of poor academic performance and dropout rates, advocating for targeted interventions.¹³</p>

		Suspension & Expulsion rate	% students suspended or expelled (as reported on the Federal Report Card on the Indiana GPS) ¹⁴	Indicates school climate and behavioral strategies. Skiba & Peterson (2000) showed that reducing disciplinary incidents improves school climate and supports positive student-teacher relationships. ¹⁵
		Strength of Diploma	% students receiving Honors and Plus Diplomas (as reported on the Indiana GPS) ¹⁶	Measures student's and school's achievement levels for honors and honors plus
		Postsecondary outcomes	% students enrolled in postsecondary institutions or employed in Indiana within 12 months (as reported on the Indiana GPS) ¹⁷	Reflects the effectiveness of college and career counseling. Rosenbaum et al. (2010) demonstrated that proactive college guidance increases postsecondary enrollment, especially among first-generation students. ¹⁸
		Teacher retention rate	% teachers remaining from previous year	Indicates staff satisfaction and stability. Ingersoll (2001) demonstrated that high turnover disrupts school culture and lowers student achievement. ¹⁹

Leveraging Existing Metrics

In alignment with the acknowledged best practices on data collection, Indiana already collects and publicly distributes reliable, statewide data across several key indicators, including ILEARN proficiency and growth, IREAD-3 results, PSAT and SAT participation and performance, chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, diploma types, and college and career readiness benchmarks (such as dual credit, AP, IB, industry certifications, and ASVAB). Continuing to collect these data will set our students up for long-term success. **These data points—publicly reported through the [Indiana Department of State Education's GPS Dashboard](#)²⁰—offer a strong foundation for a more transparent, comprehensive accountability framework.** By formally incorporating these data points into Indiana's accountability framework, the state can move beyond simply measuring outcomes—it can actively promote what works. Leveraging both existing data and research-backed practices within the school grading system will empower educators, school leaders, district leaders, and policymakers to make more informed decisions, allocate resources more effectively, and drive meaningful, lasting improvement for all Hoosier students.

"We already collect the data. Now it's time to use it to build a system that tells the whole story—not just who passed the test, but who had access to rigorous classes, consistent teachers, and the support they needed to show up and succeed." — **High School English Teacher**²¹

"Students don't succeed in a vacuum. If we really want to understand school quality, we have to include the inputs—like access to AP, stable teaching staff, and family partnerships—that we know make a difference." — **Guidance Counselor**²²

1. Student Performance

This metric serves as a direct measure of how well students are mastering the skills and content required by Indiana state academic standards. It reflects the quality of instruction, alignment of curriculum, and effectiveness of educational strategies used by teachers. High performance in this area is critical not only for accountability but also for ensuring that students possess the foundational knowledge needed for future academic and life success. Ensuring students meet or exceed these standards demonstrates a commitment to educational excellence and equity across all student demographics.²³

2. Individual Student Growth

Unlike static achievement scores, growth metrics offer a dynamic look at student progress over time, helping educators identify how effectively instruction supports individual learners at every ability level. This is particularly important in schools serving diverse or historically underserved populations, as growth-focused metrics help recognize success even when students begin the year below grade level. They provide a more equitable and nuanced picture of school impact by accounting for where students start and how far they progress, giving a picture to not only individual student effort, but overall school support structure and performance.²⁴

3. **Reduced Achievement Gaps**

This metric tracks disparities in academic performance between student groups, such as by race, income level, or special education status. It underscores the need for schools to close opportunity gaps and address systemic inequities that affect learning. Focusing on achievement gaps challenges schools to ensure that all students—not just the average—are making progress and reaching high standards.^{25 26}

4. **College and Career Readiness**

Success in advanced coursework is a strong indicator of a student's readiness for postsecondary education. This metric demonstrates both access to rigorous classes and the level of support provided to help students succeed in them. High passing rates show that schools are preparing students for the demands of college-level work, which research links to higher college persistence and graduation rates. Furthermore, equitable access to these courses ensures that all students—not just the highest achievers—have the opportunity to earn college credit and develop academic confidence.^{27 28}

Improving Accountability with New Metrics

1. **Strength of Diploma**

Tracking how many students achieve the recently established goals of “Employment, Enlistment, or Enrollment” (E3) via the Honors and Honors Plus Seals diplomas highlights not only the completion of minimum graduation requirements but the pursuit of excellence. These seals acknowledge students who go beyond the basics to meet elevated academic and career readiness criteria. The metric also helps identify how well schools are challenging students, supporting ambition, and creating a culture that values high achievement for all via a variety of pathways to future success.^{29 30}

2. **Chronic Absenteeism Rate**

Chronic absenteeism is a powerful early-warning indicator that a student may be struggling academically, socially, or emotionally. This metric goes beyond average attendance by highlighting students who miss significant amounts of instructional time. High rates of chronic absenteeism often reflect systemic barriers—such as transportation, health issues, or school climate—that must be addressed to create more equitable learning environments. Reducing chronic absenteeism requires a proactive, multi-tiered approach to student support and intervention.^{31 32}

3. **Postsecondary Outcomes**

This metric captures the effectiveness of a school's college and career counseling programs and their ability to support students through the complex transition to higher education. It is especially important for first-generation college students who may require additional guidance. High postsecondary enrollment rates suggest that students are leaving high school with the necessary academic preparation, confidence, and support to pursue further education.^{33 34}

4. Suspension & Expulsion Rate

This metric reflects both student behavior and the school's approach to discipline. A high number of incidents may indicate a need for improved classroom management, social-emotional learning programs, or restorative justice practices. Conversely, lower rates may suggest a positive school climate where students feel respected and expectations are clear. Monitoring discipline data also helps ensure practices are fair, equitable, and do not disproportionately affect certain student groups.³⁵

5. Teacher Retention Rate

High teacher turnover disrupts instruction, strains resources, and undermines school culture. A strong retention rate can signal a supportive work environment where teachers feel valued, professionally fulfilled, and motivated to stay. Retaining high-quality educators contributes directly to student achievement and provides stability for school communities. Integrating teacher retention as an accountability metric can help schools and districts prioritize teacher support and professional development as an important factor for student success.^{36 37}

"These seals represent ambition, grit, and readiness. When we celebrate students who go above and beyond, we also spotlight schools that foster high expectations and opportunity."

— CTE Teacher³⁸

"We can't close achievement gaps if kids aren't in class. Tracking chronic absenteeism forces us to look at the barriers our students face and build systems that meet them with support, not blame." — Middle School Teacher³⁹

Establishing a New Framework: Recommendations

1. Expand the set of indicators used to evaluate school performance to include strength of diploma, chronic absenteeism rates, postsecondary outcomes, suspension and expulsion rates, and teacher retention.

To modernize Indiana's school accountability framework, the state should expand the set of indicators used to evaluate school performance. Key metrics—such as chronic absenteeism rates, suspension and expulsion rates, strength of diploma, postsecondary outcomes, and teacher retention—offer valuable insights into both student outcomes and school conditions. With the exception of teacher retention, these data points are already collected and publicly reported through the [Indiana Department of Education's GPS Dashboard](#).⁴⁰ Building off what Indiana has historically tracked by including these additional metrics in the accountability formula, the state would be shifting the system toward a more holistic and comprehensive model—one that values both academic results and the critical supports that contribute to long-term student success.

"We can't keep judging schools by test scores alone. Including metrics like teacher retention and postsecondary outcomes gives us a fuller, more honest picture of what success really looks like." — Superintendent, Southern Indiana⁴¹

"You can't measure student success without looking at the environment that shapes it. Absenteeism, discipline, and teacher stability all impact learning. Accountability should recognize that."

— Middle School Teacher⁴²

2. Determine formulas and weights thoughtfully, in partnership with key stakeholders.

To ensure this accountability framework is evidence-based, fair, meaningful, and aligned with school realities, the formulas and weights assigned to each metric must be developed in close partnership with educators, administrators, families, and community stakeholders. Their firsthand experience and expertise are essential to ensure that the framework incentivizes the right behaviors, supports continuous improvement, prioritizes student learning, and accurately reflects school performance across diverse contexts.

3. Invest in collecting data on teacher retention.

Finally, Indiana should prioritize the consistent collection and meaningful reporting of teacher retention data across the state. Research consistently shows that retaining effective educators is one of the most important factors in student achievement—yet this critical measure remains underutilized in accountability conversations. Investing in this data infrastructure will not only support smarter policy decisions, but also elevate the importance of educator stability as a cornerstone of school and student success.

Additional Considerations: Transparency on Multiple Measures

As Indiana reexamines accountability in education, it's essential to track a broader, more inclusive set of indicators that—while not suited for grading—provide critical context for understanding school performance. These data points should be collected and publicly shared to support informed decision-making, enabling families and students to choose the best educational options and take meaningful action. By focusing on these dimensions now, Indiana can lay the groundwork for a more equitable, transparent, and comprehensive accountability framework—one that reflects not only outcomes but also the conditions necessary for every student to thrive.

+ Teacher workforce details

This metric examines the demographics of the teaching staff—such as years of experience, licensure status and details, preparation pathway (Educator Preparation Program vs. alternative routes), race/ethnicity, and gender—which gives a holistic picture to Indiana's teacher workforce and can inform ongoing teacher recruitment, retention, and placement policies and strategies.⁴³ Information regarding vacancies and forthcoming openings can allow incoming teachers to identify future opportunities and plan accordingly. Additionally, the data collected on the teacher workforce when compared to our student populations can help highlight the extent to which students see themselves reflected in the adults who teach and support them. A diverse teaching workforce fosters culturally responsive instruction, strengthens student-teacher relationships, and contributes to improved academic outcomes for all students.⁴⁴

+ Community partnership programs

Community partnerships are essential for expanding the resources and opportunities available to students beyond what a school can provide on its own. These partnerships may include local businesses, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, higher education institutions, and, increasingly, apprenticeship providers.⁴⁵ As graduation requirements evolve to emphasize real-world readiness through the goals of the “Employment, Enlistment, Enrollment” (E3) pathways, partnerships that offer internships, mentorships, job-shadowing, and registered apprenticeships have become especially valuable. Schools that cultivate a diverse network of community partnerships can provide students with authentic work-based learning experiences that develop both technical and soft skills aligned with local workforce needs. Tracking the number and quality of these partnerships not only reflects a school’s ability to prepare students for postsecondary success but also its engagement with the broader economic and civic community. This data can also highlight areas for support where partnerships may be more challenging to come by in certain parts of the state.⁴⁶

+ Per-pupil spending

Varying widely across Indiana’s regions and cities, this metric considers the needs of a district’s student population and reflects how effectively a school or district is able to prioritize and allocate resources.⁴⁷ Spending on instruction—teacher salaries, classroom materials, and academic supports—has a direct impact on student learning. By tracking this ratio, schools can evaluate whether financial decisions align with educational goals and ensure that funding supports core student needs. Additionally, districts can learn from each other regarding resource allocation and informed financial decision making modeled by other districts, improving the landscape for all.⁴⁸

+ School climate results (both student and teacher results)

Student voice is a vital yet often underutilized component of school improvement. This metric captures how students perceive their learning environment—whether they feel safe, included, challenged, and supported.⁴⁹ High satisfaction rates indicate a healthy, student-centered culture that fosters engagement, motivation, and academic success. Gathering this feedback empowers schools to respond to students’ needs and make meaningful changes. Additionally, teachers’ insights in response to these surveys can act as a key data point for ongoing improvement for schools and districts year over year.⁵⁰

+ Mental health service offerings

With mental health concerns on the rise among youth, this metric evaluates whether schools are effectively identifying needs and connecting students and families to available resources.⁵¹ It reflects the accessibility, destigmatization, and responsiveness of the school’s mental health systems. Higher utilization rates suggest that students and families trust the support systems in place, while lower rates may indicate gaps in service awareness or access.⁵²

+ Family engagement opportunities

Parental engagement is a cornerstone of student success and school improvement. Traditionally measured through participation in events or volunteering, this metric reflects the

strength of the home-school connection and a family's role in supporting student learning.⁵³ However, engagement is not always visible through physical attendance—it can also be expressed through communication, decision-making involvement, and advocacy. To more accurately capture these dimensions, parent perception surveys offer a valuable complementary or alternative approach. These surveys assess how welcomed, informed, and empowered families feel in the school community. Including both behavioral data (e.g., event attendance, conference participation) and perceptual data (survey responses) provides a fuller picture of engagement. Schools that actively measure and respond to parent input are better positioned to build trust, address barriers to involvement, and improve outcomes for students across diverse backgrounds.⁵⁴

+ Facility condition index

A school's physical environment plays a critical role in student and staff well-being.⁵⁵ This metric assesses the state of school buildings and whether they are safe, functional, and conducive to learning. Well-maintained facilities support attendance, morale, and academic performance, while neglected infrastructure can signal deeper systemic inequities.⁵⁶

Shifting the System to Set Students Up for Success:

- + Teacher Evaluation:** In 2011, Indiana moved to performance-based evaluations⁵⁷ for teachers with a focus on ensuring student data and outcomes were integrated into an educator's yearly evaluation. Over time, inconsistency in implementation across districts, ongoing teacher shortages, and lack of time to implement with fidelity has led to teacher evaluations being viewed as a punitive "check the box" activity, rather than the effective tool it could be to help teachers reflect on and improve their teaching practice. In response to pushback over the years, the state has slowly rolled back much of the requirements they originally created to guide districts in picking an evaluation system and rubric. Now districts have full discretion on how much student data is included, if at all, and the measures have become much more subjective, varying widely across districts.

For the 2023-24 school year, 89 percent of Indiana teachers were rated effective or highly effective, with 10 percent not being rated, one percent being rated as needing improvement, and zero percent of Indiana teachers that year being rated ineffective.^{58 59} Given the local discretion of teacher evaluation across districts, it is challenging to objectively determine how scores on evaluations compare across districts. At this time, while teacher evaluation is still an important metric to consider as teachers are the most critical in-school influence on student achievement, our system is not creating the right incentives or structure to ensure our teachers are receiving timely, objective, and productive feedback on their instruction. Given that reality, we are reluctant to include teacher evaluation, as it currently stands, in our accountability metrics and instead recommend a deep dive on this issue in the coming year or two to establish a system that will reward the right behaviors and be a meaningful experience for teachers, administrators, and students alike.

Additionally, while Indiana teachers are required to complete 90 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) or Professional Growth Points (PGPs) to renew their licenses, there is wide variability on the sources that can provide these experiences.^{60 61} Given the importance of ongoing learning and teacher evaluation, the hours for renewal of licensure should be tied directly to meaningful professional development relevant to educators' current teaching assignments. A metric tied to teacher ongoing learning and integration of said skills should, in the future, reflect how much time and priority a school dedicates to continuous improvement and growth for educators—Indiana must ensure educators are equipped with the tools, strategies, and content knowledge to directly impact student achievement.

- + **Freshman on Track:** One of the most predictive early indicators of high school graduation is whether a student is “on track” by the end of 9th grade, typically defined as earning a minimum number of core course credits with no more than one failing grade. According to the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, students who are on track in 9th grade are three to four times more likely to graduate than those who fall behind.⁶² States such as Illinois, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Minnesota have integrated 9th grade on-track metrics into their accountability frameworks to support early intervention and improve graduation outcomes.^{63 64} For example, Chicago Public Schools saw substantial gains in graduation rates after implementing a comprehensive on-track model that included mentoring, tutoring, and real-time teacher-led data monitoring.⁶⁵ Similarly, Washington state uses on-track indicators to target school supports and prioritize resource allocation.⁶⁶

Ensuring students are on track by 9th grade requires more than high school-level intervention, however. Research from the American Institutes for Research and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins highlights the importance of early-warning systems that begin in elementary and middle school, tracking indicators such as attendance, behavior, and course performance.⁶⁷ These systems depend on the active engagement of K–8 educators, who play a critical role in identifying and supporting at-risk students before high school. A 2018 study by Faria et al. found that interventions coordinated across grade levels—with collaboration between elementary, middle, and high school teachers—significantly improved the effectiveness of on-track strategies.⁶⁸ By creating a cohesive, multi-level support system, schools can intervene earlier and more effectively, increasing the likelihood that students begin high school ready to succeed—and ultimately graduate on time.

Conclusion

Our proposed metrics create a more holistic framework for evaluating school performance—one that moves beyond test scores to reflect academic achievement, student engagement, college and career readiness, and community involvement. By drawing on this broader set of data points, Indiana can more effectively target improvement efforts, enhance student experiences, and promote equitable progress across the state. For this framework to succeed, it must reflect both the aspirations of Indiana's communities and the complex realities within schools. That means recognizing the diversity of student needs, investing in professional learning for educators, and strengthening school-community partnerships. Transparent reporting and clear communication will be critical for rebuilding public trust and empowering families with the information they need to support their children's education.

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About Teach Plus

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning for students.

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68. See Endnote 63.