

Why the Arts Indicator Still Matters

Equity, Accountability, and the Future of Illinois Education

The ESSA Arts Indicator was designed to affirm what research and educators have known for decades: arts education is essential, not extracurricular. Its removal from Illinois' accountability redesign threatens to undo years of progress toward educational equity, particularly in communities historically denied access to quality arts learning.

In March 2020, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) unanimously approved the creation of an arts indicator in the Illinois Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan to include the arts as a distinct, weighted indicator of K-12 success in its school accountability system. This unanimous adoption positioned Illinois as a national leader forwarding a well-rounded and creative education as an outcome of K-12 education.

Despite this early leadership and five years to implement, the weighted arts indicator has been abandoned in ISBE's Accountability Redesign which eliminates numerical scoring and removes the arts and creativity entirely from the equation.

We are calling on ISBE to uphold its commitment to Illinois students and communities by:

- **Adopting a weighted ESSA Arts Indicator that centers equity and access.**
- **Creating an Arts Education Specialist role to steward implementation with integrity.**



Artwork by Cecilia Beaven

Schools with access to arts education during the school day are...

5x

less likely to have students drop out

4x

more likely to recognize students for academic achievement

3x

more likely to see students pursue a bachelor's degree

2x

as likely to graduate from college (if receiving arts education in an under-resourced community)

What would the weighted indicator do?

ISBE currently uses an accountability system to rate schools on math proficiency, attendance, English language proficiency, and more. The resulting score, between 0 and 100, determines how well a school meets its students' needs and identifies which schools require the most support. ISBE proposes overhauling this system entirely and keeping the Arts indicator unscored and unweighted. **The weighted arts indicator would allow schools to receive up to five points depending on the quality and availability of their arts offerings.** Schools that offer adequate arts education to their students will receive high scores, while schools that do not would be flagged as requiring additional resources to meet the needs of their students.

Abandoning the major accomplishment of a weighted arts indicator now would be a step backward for students in Illinois, creating inequities and disparities in educational offerings.

What Would an Arts Educator Specialist (AES) at ISBE do?

Many school districts may need support to implement an indicator. At the school level, they don't have a department chair of fine arts or a director of fine arts. At the district level, they don't have directors of fine arts or STEAM directors. An AES at ISBE is necessary to equitably support every district with its continuous improvement.



Find an upcoming
ISBE listening
session



View ISBE's
Accountability
Redesign Plan



View ISBE's current
accountability system

Get Involved

State Superintendent of Education Dr. Tony Sanders, Chief of Staff Dr. Kimako Patterson, and Data, Accountability & Assessment Executive Director Rae Clementz are gathering input on the latest assessment and accountability redesign updates.

ISBE invites administrators, educators, and other stakeholders to preview and give feedback on possible accountability models and assessment performance level descriptors that will lay the foundation for new proficiency benchmarks. The last session will take place on May 22, 2025 in Chicago. Find a listening session in your area and register to attend using the QR code on this page.

Thank you to the following stakeholders, partners, and educators who supported the creation of this document.



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