



www.indianacoalitionforpubliced.org
PO Box 7093, Fishers, IN 46037

The vision of the non-partisan Indiana Coalition for Public Education is to advocate for high quality, equitable, well-funded public schools for all children that are subject to democratic oversight by their communities.

Questions from Legislative Post-Session Review Zoom Webinar

May 1, 2025

Thirteenth Check

Q: Can you explain generally why we have 13th checks? Who gets a 13th check? - educator retirees and support staff (people who get a perf, correct?)

A: Yes, that is correct. The 13th check would apply to any public employee who has retired. The 13th check was something that was put into place many years ago, and it has kind-of gone back and forth over the years as to whether retirees would receive a COLA (cost of living adjustment) to their retirement, or a 13th check. Over time, many of those employees have come to rely upon that 13th check to be able to make certain payments that they have. Normally, these retirees would be getting one check per month during the course of the year or 12 checks— and that 13th check is what allows for what might otherwise be a cost of living adjustment. There has been a lot of debate and discussion in the General Assembly over the years about whether we should move solely to a cost of living adjustment that is adjusted annually, or whether we should continue to give this 13th check. The 13th check legislation did pass this year. So public employees, including teachers, retirees, or anyone who has been an employee of a public school, or a public governmental entity, will now get that 13th check going forward for the next two year biennium.

Federal DEI Restrictions and Possible Lawsuits

Q: Will there be any changes or possibly lawsuits now that 3 federal judges have said the federal / Trump admin's restrictions on DEI does not apply or go forward for K-12 schools? (Hopefully I'm explaining clearly) re: 1002 moved to remove certain courses from being taught supposedly because of federal funding being in jeopardy?

A: There's a difference between what a Federal executive order, coming from a President, can legally do versus what a legislature can legally do in Indiana. With the state legislature passing these restrictions on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy and practices, the state will be less open to civil lawsuits than a Federal executive order.

Partisan School Boards

Q: Is there any chance that the governor will veto SB 287?

A: No. Zero chance.

Q: Will school board elections be affected by straight-ticket voting if the candidates for school board have declared a party affiliation?

A: One of the concessions we received in that bill was that if a person goes into their election booth on election day, and they just push the button or pull the lever for a straight party ticket, it will have no impact on the School Board races. They will still have to go and vote for those school board races separately from pulling a straight party ticket.

Special Education

Q: Can you share the WFYI series on special education? I can't find it in my quick search.

A: Here is the WFYI series. Unfortunately it doesn't mention lack of funding as a problem. But you have to wonder - what if we were to fully fund special education and education in general?

The series is on discipline but, so far, the articles are special education focused.

<https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/indiana-special-education-student-out-of-school-suspensions>

<https://www.wfyi.org/news/articles/indiana-students-out-of-school-suspension-pandemic-fighting>

We note the disclaimer on one of the articles: "The Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation is among the financial supporters of initiatives based at WFYI." The Fairbanks Foundation has historically been a vocal supporter and funder of education-reform (or privatization) policies.

Homeschool Diplomas

Q: Are there provisions around when homeschool diplomas are issued? For example, a student completed homeschool 5 years ago. Can the student simply print off a diploma now?

A: There are no regulations around home schools in Indiana. So, yes, if a parent wanted to go print off a diploma for their child and say that they've been homeschooled, that now has to be accepted.

Rural Communities

Q: Why do you think rural communities vote for politicians who vote for vouchers that hurt their community schools?

A: ICPE works very hard to inform our communities and connect the dots between what happens in the statehouse with what happens in the classroom. This question speaks to the need to support our work! When rural and urban communities see that their public schools' fates (and that of their children) are intertwined, we will be closer to winning whole scale support for public education from all Hoosiers. As individuals, we need to be taking this conversation not just to our legislators, but to our neighbors, friends and people in our community. Most people love their public schools and the vast majority of Hoosiers choose to send their kids to public schools.

Takeover of the Union School Corporation

Q: Union School Corporation: Can you talk about that process, and how that happened?

A: Yes, absolutely. This was another example of legislation added at the last minute—specifically, it was inserted into the final version of the Budget Bill (HEA 1001). There was no standalone piece of legislation introduced during the session that addressed Union School Corporation, meaning it never received a hearing in any committee. The first time this proposal appeared was in the final Conference Committee report on the budget—essentially at the very end of the legislative process.

Union School Corporation, located in Randolph County, is a very small district, serving fewer than 300 students in its traditional brick-and-mortar schools. However, it also operates a virtual school program that enrolls over a thousand students from across the state. That program is run by Stride, which is led by former State Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Tony Bennett.

There has been a lot of controversy surrounding virtual charter schools in Indiana, including ongoing criminal investigations and significant unaccounted-for public funds. Unfortunately, the Attorney General has shown little urgency in pursuing those cases or recovering that money.

Now, with this legislation, Union School Corporation will be dissolved and its territory divided among neighboring public school districts. That means both the students and the community are being split up and reassigned without any input from the people most directly affected. That's what we find most disheartening: the public was given no voice in a decision that has such deep consequences for their schools and community.

To make matters worse, the State Representative for that area, J.D. Prescott, not only supported this move but also claims to have authored the language that led to the school's closure. It appears he's now facing backlash from his constituents—and frankly, we think that response is warranted.