

Dear XXXXXX XXXXX,

The Carmel Clay Board of School Trustees, along with our Superintendent and other education leaders, thank you for your commitment to the citizens of our state and specifically to the children of Indiana. While the past biennium has been very difficult for educators, we have also seen renewed enthusiasm in our education community and a return to more of a sense of normalcy and gratefulness as we continue the transition from the pandemic.

We, again, offer our support to Indiana's policy leaders to develop initiatives to promote the education profession as a noble, respected, and rewarding career in service to the children and families of Indiana. We think it is imperative to continue the message that Indiana is an educator-friendly state. Funding for educators is again a top priority in making Indiana educator income not only more competitive in the Midwest, but also at a high enough level to attract young people into the profession and retain the effective educators that we are unfortunately at increased risk of losing to other professions and early retirement.

The volume of open positions in Indiana schools, even now in the middle of the school year, reinforces the seriousness of the educator shortage. The number of young people choosing education as a career pathway continues to be far short of the need making this a critical time in Indiana educational history. We offer to work alongside you and other stakeholders to turn this trend around. With so much at stake, it is imperative that we inspire and encourage young people to commit to a profession in education.

We believe educator recruitment and retention must be a top consideration when developing education policy. Thoroughly evaluating all policy proposals through this lens should be the priority. We can set Indiana apart by sending clear messages to current and future educators that they are valued, trusted, and we have their backs. It is paramount we seize the opportunity to compassionately restore the higher calling of being a professional educator. When thinking about educators, please keep in mind the teachers that made a positive difference in your life and the lives of your loved ones. It is in the classroom where the magic of education happens, students are known, loved, challenged, and encouraged to become lifelong learners.

Our goal remains to partner with you, our state leaders, by being a credible resource from the field on matters related to educating our children. We also offer to provide feedback to help minimize negative financial or organizational consequences stemming from even the best-intended policy. We are in a unique position to share "boots on the ground" information on how regulation and compliance plays out at the local level.

While we offer to help with any policy considerations related to education, here are some examples of common interests we have identified:

Workforce: Schools across Indiana are struggling to fill high-need positions. Those positions are at critical shortage levels with other subjects heading in the same direction. While almost all positions are difficult to fill, the positions that are at triage levels including licensed special educators, counselors, social workers, bus drivers, and food service workers. And while mental health treatment should not be the responsibility of the school, we are directly impacted by the critical shortage of behavioral health therapists. Recruiting, training and retaining our workforce is critical to keeping learning fully operational and keeping our communities strong.

Regulatory Relief: Indiana Educators must navigate 450+ mandates in Title 20 of the Indiana Code and 511 of the Indiana Administrative Code that are without expiration. The heavy weight of these accumulated mandates detract from allowing educators from maximizing focus on learning and administrators from tailoring resources to the needs and desires of the school constituents. Regulatory relief will accomplish, among other things: focus on what is best for

individual student needs, communicate the nobility of a profession in education, return local governance of the classroom, aligns with Indiana's shift away from state accountability and to community governance, allows communities to promote unique strength and address challenges, and increase overall government efficiency. Government norms and process should dictate that every mandate placed on educators should be justified based on widespread need. And every mandate should expire so the advocate stakeholders prove the return on investment (ROI) and "the juice is worth the squeeze."

Special Education and Access to Treatment for Violent, Aggressive and Dysregulated Behavior: The rise in young children with violent, aggressive and dysregulated behavior is the most concerning development that people outside of education are most likely unaware. At best, it is a drain on limited resources. At worst, it is the most challenging dilemma that educators can face. Trying to address the behavioral needs of one student against the disruption and safety of other students, let alone your own personal safety, is extremely difficult, stressful, and exhausting. We must adequately create and/or fund spaces to serve children with these behaviors through the special education excess cost fund and special education funding in general. Perhaps most important, the families in each community must have adequate access to behavioral health treatment spanning from evaluation, to intense day treatment, to even residential treatment. Not addressing this issue will most likely result in justice systems growing as the state's largest mental health provider.

Student Safety: Multiple layers are needed to address the safety needs of students. We are fortunate to have at least one highly trained School Resource Officer in every school in our district. They serve as the one person whose focused responsibility is on keeping the school safe. It is our responsibility to use all tools available to create a safe environment to enable students to access the educational programming needed to learn and grow to be independent thinkers who have the skills necessary to be successful. Increased flexibility and funding of the school safety grant would create these vital layers. Creating pathways and eliminating barriers to the flow of information between entities like juvenile probation, the Department of Child Services, and schools would offer much needed collaboration for struggling students and families.

Once again, thank you for your commitment to the education of the children of Indiana. We at Carmel Clay Schools stand ready to partner with you as a resource from the field on all matters related to educating our children. We are committed to doing our part to promote Indiana as a destination where educators are valued, respected, want to serve, and a place with strong schools where families want to live and raise their kids.



Dr. Michael Beresford
Superintendent



Mrs. Katie Browning
School Board President




Mrs. Louise Jackson
School Board Vice President



Ms. Jennifer Nelson Williams
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Mr. Michael Kerschner
School Board Member



Mrs. Layla Spanenberg
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