



Illinois ESSA Arts Indicator – Q & A

A major development recently occurred in arts education. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) included an arts indicator in its Every Student Succeeds Act implementation plan. What does this mean? The Q & A below explains the indicator, discusses its importance, and outlines the vital work yet to do.

What is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)?

Enacted in December 2015 with strong bipartisan support, ESSA replaced No Child Left Behind and gives states more flexibility in how they design their system of school accountability and support. Under ESSA, states can look beyond just test scores and consider multiple, holistic indicators of school quality and student success. The ESSA definition of “well-rounded education” includes the arts.

How does the Illinois ESSA State Plan address school accountability?

The Illinois State Plan for implementing ESSA establishes a new system to understand the performance and needs of schools. Under this new accountability system, schools will receive points based on weighted indicators. Examples of indicators in Illinois’ new system include PARCC (P-8) and SAT (9-12) scores, English learner proficiency, science, climate surveys, and chronic absenteeism.

How does Illinois’ new accountability system include the arts?

Illinois’ new accountability system also includes the arts as a school quality indicator! In fact, the arts are one of only five indicators of school quality, and the arts indicator covers elementary *and* high schools.

Why is the arts indicator important?

The indicator upholds the arts as essential to K-12 student success and opens the door to potential new funding and support for arts learning. The indicator will also lead to a greater, data-based understanding of the extent of arts education in Illinois and will help incentivize schools to make the arts available to more students. State Board of Education member Craig Lindvahl summarized the indicator’s importance:

I’ve been here a long time, and I don’t ever remember the arts being anything but “we’re just not going to deal with the arts.” So, to have it as an official member of the criteria we’re looking at is an important thing, and I also like very much that we’re required to now weight that.

What input did ISBE receive regarding an arts indicator?

Arts Alliance Illinois and partner organizations kept up a year-long campaign for an arts indicator. Throughout the state, arts educators, administrators, and supporters testified, met with policy makers, and submitted comments. Nearly 3,000 comments were submitted to ISBE in support of the arts indicator, more than all other comments combined.

How will the arts indicator be measured?

We are entering new territory in that not many states, including Illinois, have ever utilized an arts



indicator before. Given this, the arts indicator does not yet have a method of measurement. The State Board has called for a process of exploring the possibilities and developing the indicator's measure.

What weight will the arts indicator have?

The arts indicator will have zero percent weight until a specific measure is developed and receives ISBE approval. Until then, ISBE will collect and report data on student participation in arts courses. The State Board has committed to a four-year timeline for crafting the new indicator's specific measure and giving it weight, but as stated by ISBE Chairman James Meeks, "We are going to speed up that process."

How will the indicator's measure and weight be determined?

Work has already begun! In partnership with ISBE, Arts Alliance Illinois is coordinating the process of developing recommendations for the arts indicator's measure and weight. A diverse, statewide work group began meeting in March 2018, with the goal of submitting its recommendations to ISBE by December 2018. The process will continue to be transparent, participatory, and inclusive.

How can I learn more?

For more information and to get involved, please contact Jonathan VanderBrug, Policy & Research Director, Arts Alliance Illinois, at vanderbrug@artsalliance.org or 312-855-3105 x 12.