

EDUCATION FORWARD

Jenner Returns to Push New Administration's Agenda

By Matt Ottinger

Governor Mike Braun transitioned from a U.S. senator into the role of leading the state as its 52nd governor in January.

Among his key objectives is an aggressive education agenda focused on providing choice, improving schools and raising teacher salaries.

To do so, he's enlisted a familiar face, retaining the Holcomb administration's Secretary of Education, Dr. Katie Jenner.

BizVoice® recently spoke with Jenner about key questions pertaining to Indiana's students, educators and employers.

BV: Regarding early learning and pre-kindergarten education, the state's program serving low-income families has experienced significant demand and there are waiting lists. The funding is a question. Will addressing that be a priority and are you optimistic about that?

Katie Jenner: "Certainly, making sure our workforce has adequate childcare is a priority for the team. Making sure we maximize the dollars that are presently in the budget in the early learning space will be key. We'll be doing some evaluation and analysis to ensure we're driving the greatest return on investment with the dollars in the budget today. The challenge, no doubt, that we have ahead is based on the revenue forecast that came out in December with a 3% increase year one and a 0.3% increase year two.

"That's definitely one of the tighter budgets that we've seen in the past few years. So, you're going to see in this session a lot of discussion about what we can sustain and grow versus what might need to move off the budget bill and (where to) reallocate those dollars."

BV: Broadly, how do you view your department's role between directing local schools and school corporations – particularly those with low student performance numbers – and then balancing that with local control?

KJ: "In about (mid-February), you're going to see where we're ranked nationwide. I can't get over my skis in what I share with that data, but we watch that closely and how Indiana compares to every other state in the nation and then every country. ... Of the data that is only in Indiana, we've seen three consecutive years of IREAD scores going up. The largest jump actually was this past year when we saw the highest increase we've seen since the start of the test back in 2012. I think it's essential that we continue to ensure our teachers have the best support and training in the science of reading, i how to teach for those five components of reading ...

"You're also going to see this session, a lot of discussion on mathematics and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). So, where we've really stepped our foot on the gas is with reading and those results are paying off. You're going to see us stepping on the gas with mathematics and supporting schools who are ready to really move forward there. And also, supporting those schools who may be struggling with math and STEM to make sure we're maximizing opportunities for kids.

"The foundations that we build, by the way, in partnership with schools and educators and parents and families, those foundations are absolutely essential in those early grades. And quite frankly, if the foundation is not established in the early grades, we can almost predict what the outcomes 20 years from third grade will be for that child."

BV: How about extending universal choice to all families? What steps do you hope to take in that area?

KJ: "Governor Braun and I are very passionate about making sure



Jenner was among the judges at the state's first-ever Indiana Civics Bee last year at the Statehouse, hosted by the Indiana Chamber and the Indiana Department of Education, in partnership with the U.S. Chamber Foundation.

that parents have the best options for their students. That could include traditional public schools, charter schools or non-public schools. Of course, the largest choice we have throughout the state is traditional public schools. That's the largest even that we see for school to school transfers.

"But the key is that the parents have the support to make the choice for what's best for themselves, so I think you'll continue to see Indiana move towards a free market for education where parents do have that choice. What we're hearing is sometimes parents have one child that goes to one school and one child that goes to another because that's what's best for them. And we absolutely want to make sure that is an option. The other thing that I would highlight is we have to keep our eye on the ball in making sure all of our schools are quality. I think in the past, we sometimes have gotten into an 'us versus them' mindset, and that's really dangerous because it's absolutely imperative that we focus on quality for all kids.

"I live in Jefferson County in southern Indiana. We have two traditional public school corporations. We have a charter school, we have two non-public school corporations and as a resident, we need every single one of those to be excellent. That's what you'll continue to see us working toward."

BV: Governor Braun wants to increase base teacher pay and reward our best teachers and fill high demand teacher openings with pay differentiation. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?

KJ: (Jenner notes Senate Bill 146, authored by State Sen. Linda Rogers (R-Granger), has been proposed to address this.)

"Let me just give you some highlights ... increasing teacher compensation is absolutely a priority. We were able to move the needle in base salary and in salary average under Governor Holcomb. Governor Braun absolutely wants to continue to push that momentum, so he will have a bill that will increase the base pay to \$45,000. The starting ... that minimum is going to go up. You'll also see a push for us to increase the percentage requirement of tuition support to 65%.

"Presently, schools are required to spend, because they decide locally on teacher salary. That's a key point. Schools are required to spend 62% of their tuition support on teachers' salary compensation. We are going to push to increase more of that money going straight to our teachers. We know all education starts with parents and families and when it comes to a school, having a quality teacher in that classroom is the most important element to set that child up for success."



Pairing K-12 education with vocational needs and increasing school choice are among top priorities for Jenner and the Braun administration.

BV: Regarding career pathways, could you briefly summarize what's been done to date and what next steps could happen over the next few years?

KJ: "The reality is we have shining bright spots scattered throughout our state where communities are blurring the lines between K-12, higher education and workforce – building those talent pathways that are quite successful locally ...

"What we've tried to do is remove some of the barriers that are in the way for our local communities to thrive. So really listening to our people with boots on the ground who are doing the really important work for kids and people, and understanding what is in their way that we as a state could clear out.

"One of the big things that we've heard over the years that we tackled very publicly (last) year is to increase flexibility for the high school diploma, but also to be much more intentional with what that outcome is for students.

"(Case in point) increasing credentials of value that are market driven, increasing work-based learning opportunities for students when appropriate. We'll continue to be working on the implementation of all of the pieces and parts that go with that ...

"The Indiana Chamber of Commerce has already been a partner and will continue to be a key partner in developing and solidifying that market-driven credential value list. Today, we have hundreds of credentials on a list that we can offer to students. The key is (asking), does the credential mean something for the individual and does the credential mean something for our economy? It will be really important to continue to partner with the Chamber to really streamline that list, simplify that list and make sure the credentials we are working towards are the credentials that are

needed in our talent pipeline, but also really matter for that individual earning them.

"The other element that I want to hit on is the work-based learning element. The Chamber has also been a big partner in thinking through that, and I think that will only continue to increase.

"And whether that is working on the (CEMETS iLab Indiana), which I know your CEO Vanessa Green Sinderson is on; quite a few of your members of the Chamber are also on the iLab team. So, we'll continue to work together to build experiences in work-based learning through apprenticeships. Of course, that's the crème de la crème of work-based learning.

"There's also other work-based learning that is really valuable for students ... so instead of K-12 just being a push system to push students through, it becomes a pull system where we're pulling students through to something that is meaningful ahead."

BV: Building on the work-based learning component, the Chamber is advocating that employers get involved and host work-and-learn experiences. But not every employer can – or is yet willing to do so. Short of providing these types of experiences, in what other ways can the business community engage and support the administration's goals and priorities?

KJ: "First of all, I would just give a huge thank you to all of our business and industry leaders who are leaning in in some form or fashion. And you're exactly right, some of our business and industry leaders are hosting apprenticeships or work-based learning experiences. Other business and industry leaders may be on advisory boards for schools who are trying to build out a manufacturing pathway –

or I should say an advanced manufacturing pathway or a cybersecurity pathway.

“I would also say when you think about the students we serve, they only know about the careers of the adults that are in their current circle. Maybe who they see at school, right? ... The key is making sure students have a real understanding of the variety of opportunities that are out there in terms of careers.

“That includes business and industry leaders going into that middle school class

and sharing a little bit about what they do, participating in the local career fair at the middle school or high school to share more about what they do.”

BV: The new governor starts alongside a new U.S. president. Are there some issues where you expect to work in tandem with the administration or the federal level?

KJ: “Yes. I’ve already been in conversations

with some of the federal leadership and ultimately any conversation I have is about how to make it better in Indiana and how to open more student opportunities, (like encouraging) more flexibility in some of the grant funding.

For example, annually in K-12 alone, we get about \$1 billion in federal funding, and we would absolutely support that to be more flexible and that to be in a block grant. Conversations like that are already happening.”

RESOURCE: Dr. Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education, at www.in.gov/doi

19th Annual Impact Awards

Work-based learning is now such a key component in building and diversifying Indiana’s talent pipeline, which is critical to moving the state forward.

A big part of that is internships.

Work and Learn Indiana (WLI) annually celebrates those involved in promoting, creating and participating in those on-the-job experiences with the Impact Awards.

This year, that recognition luncheon took place February 13 at WLI’s Indiana Work-Based Learning Conference in Noblesville and honored Hoosier interns, internship supervisors, employers and career development professionals.

An exclusive *BizVoice*® online story explores the experiences and impact of the honorees. Learn more February 17 at www.bizvoicemagazine.com.

WLI cultivates the creation and expansion of high-quality experiential opportunities throughout Indiana. It connects employers, learners, high schools, colleges and universities via its free, dynamic, searchable database and matching and reporting system. WLI is a program of the Institute for Workforce Excellence, which is a subsidiary of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.

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