**IEA Awesome Podcast**

**Episode 12 – Legislative Platform**

00:00 *Kelsey: Welcome to* the AWESOME IEA Podcast brought to you by the Illinois Education Association.

00:05 Diana: The podcast for curious well-informed association members.

00:09 *Kelsey:* I’m one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, a Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department

00:14 *Diana:* And I’m Diana Zaleski, one of your Instructional Resource and Professional Development Directors from IEA Teaching and Learning.

00:20 *Kelsey:* The goal of this podcast is to educate our members about important new educational policy initiatives in a brief and *hopefully* entertaining format.

00:28 *Diana:* Today we are going to discuss the IEA Legislative Platform with our special guest Ben Sodergren-Baar. Ben, thanks so much for being with us today.

00:36 *Ben:* Absolutely, thank you. I’m delighted to be here with you guys.

00:38 *Kelsey:* Ben, can you tell us a bit about yourself and how you became involved with the Legislative Platform Committee.

00:44 *Ben:* Well, I’ve always been interested in politics and in being an activist. I am currently finishing up my sixth year as a Grassroots Political Activist here with the Illinois Education Association. I have been a region council member for eight years now. And, most my life, just been involved and enjoyed politics in general.

01:04 *Kelsey*: So, you decided to apply to join the Legislative Platform Committee? Or, what does that look like?

01:09 *Ben:* Well, in the spring, they ask members who are interested in specific committees around the state if they’d like to be a part of a statewide committee and at that time I decided three years ago to throw my name in the ring to become part of the Legislative Platform Committee and I am finishing up my third year on the committee.

01:26 *Kelsey:* And, how many members does your committee have?

01:29 *Ben:* It ranges, currently I believe we have about a dozen members.

01:33 *Diana:* So, Ben, what is the IEA Legislative Platform?

01:36 *Ben:* Well, the Legislative Platform, it’s a living document. It is a document in clear, generalized terms for our members to be able to understand what we’re fighting for down in Springfield. And, it helps the lobbyists when they work with the General Assembly, pass legislation that’s not only good for the teachers, but also good for students, good for just all over general education in the state of Illinois.

02:00 *Kelsey*: Ben, what topics does the IEA Legislative Platform address?

02:04 *Ben:* The IEA Legislative Platform addresses all kinds of topics that are super important to members from Cairo all the way to Roscoe all the way from Moline all the way to the Chicago area. And, looks at collective bargaining, taxation, retirement benefits, rights, collective rights. Just all kinds of things that make education in Illinois important at all educational levels.

02:29 *Diana:* So, how has the IEA Legislative Platform changed?

02:33 *Ben:* Well, each year part of the charges that we get are to look at the past legislative session, to see if there’s anything that needs to be adjusted. We take input from members all over the state. We talk to region council members, we talk to region chairs. We email them, seek input from members. We look at all kinds of ways to make the platform better every year.

02:52 *Kelsey*: So, when you say you look at the past legislative session, do you mean, like, the bills that were raised, or the bills that were passed? Or, kind of, what does that mean?

03:01 *Ben:* We look at the general topic and looks at, you know, what were the hot button issues that came out of Springfield, and what are hot button issues even coming out of Washington. And, we look at things that are important to our members. It’s a living document. Our members can submit their ideas at any time to address things that are going on in our lives. Not only in our schools but things that are affecting our students.

03:24  *Kelsey*: So, Ben, you mentioned that our members can submit ideas for amendments at any time. Can you take us through what that process looks like?

03:32 *Ben:* I’d be happy to. To submit an online amendment, they really only need two things: their member’s name and password. And, then they really go through the simple process to submit an online amendment.

03:44 First, our members need to go to the IEA website ieanea.org and hold the mouse over the Legislative tab at the top. And, then just scroll down to Legislative Platform. Then, they need to log in with their Members Only name and password. Once there, they just complete the form with what change they’re looking for by entering their name, personal email address, remember guys, don’t use your school email, cell phone number and the name of what association you’re from.

04:09 And, then you need to look at the document, figure out what page number and line number you want to make changes to and click on what is their amendment. What do I mean by that? What do they want to change? Want to add something, delete something? Or, just amend something that’s already in the platform.

04:24 And, then click the appropriate response. Do you support it? Or, do you oppose it? If the amendment becomes part of the platform, do they want their lobbyist to know what IEA supports or opposes in this upcoming legislative action.

04:36 Then they just really need to tell us why we need this. What’s the rationale? Why is it important? Why do they think that our members needs this change? And, the final step is to tell us what is the text of the amendment that you want? Make sure that you tell us what the changes are and make sure it’s in clear and concise language so that everyone knows what you’re trying to get at.

04:55 Finally, guys, make sure you hit the submit button otherwise it doesn’t count.

05:01 *Kelsey*: And, so, Ben, I just want to make one clarification. When you’re choosing the appropriate response, whether it’s support or oppose, you want IEA as a whole to either support or oppose the proposed change to the Legislative Platform, correct? Not just a personal support statement or opposition statement, correct?

05:19 *Ben:* Yes, that’s absolutely correct. IEA is 130,000 members strong and we want language that supports what we as a whole organization are supporting, not just a personal view.

05:31 *Diana:* When do the amendments need to be submitted and then what happens next?

05:35 *Ben:* Well, all changes to the platform are due in January, by January twenty-fifth. And, then after the proposals submitted, it’s sent to the Legislative Committee. The Legislative Committee then discusses all the platform amendments and then votes on whether the committee is going to accept those changes at its February meeting.

05:50 The makers of all submissions are contacted by the committee about its decision after this meeting.

05:56 *Diana:* So, how are the amendments approved? Does the IEA Board of Directors approve amendments? Does anybody else approve these amendments?

06:04 *Ben:* Well, we’re just one step in the process. After the Legislative Committee reviews all those submissions, they’re going to vote on what they’re going to recommend to send to the board meeting in February. The board is going to get an opportunity to ask questions and discuss what was recommended by the committee.

06:20 And, at the board’s meeting, they’re going to either recommend to send it to the RA floor as recommended, or send it back to the maker for changes. Then, once we get to the RA, then it’s up to the delegates of the RA to whether to approve changes to the Legislative Platform.

06:38 *Diana:* Great! That was helpful. Is there option for delegates at the IEA Representative Assembly, or RA, to submit proposed amendments?

06:47 *Ben:* Yes, sometimes the world throws us a curve ball and we have to rise up to meet the challenge. Members can propose amendments to the Platform at the RA on the floor. At the RA, a paper form is available to the delegate. If they have questions, if they want to get specific language dealt with, Nicole Wills, our IEA Platform staff member, is available for help. Plus, Diane Chapman, the IEA Legislative Platform Chair, would be available at the front of the room to help write language, to help answer questions.

07:16 Platform amendments must be submitted on that first day, Thursday, before the end of the first day of business. When the amendment has been proposed, it then will go to the committee. The committee is going to look at it on Friday and then it’s going to be up to the delegation whether to approve or reject any of those proposed changes.

07:35 As we said before, it’s a living document. The delegation has the ability to have their say in whether they think this is something the IEA wants to support or oppose.

07:45 *Kelsey*: So, Ben, if IEA members have questions or they want to get involved with the IEA Legislative Platform, who should they reach to, or how should they get involved?

07:53 *Ben:* The first person they should contact is the committee chair, who is Diane Chapman. If they have more questions, or Diane can’t help them, then they would need to contact the Government Relations staff member and that’s Nicole Wills.

08:04 At any time they can contact close to a dozen committee members around the state that can also help them with any ideas or questions or language proposals they want to bring.

08:15 *Diana:* That’s great. I’m glad to hear we have so many people that can help our members around the state. Is there anything else you’d like to share about the IEA Legislative Platform with our members?

08:24 *Ben:* Our hope is just that submitting the Platform amendment changes, it’s easy. We hope that our members can look at the website and take their ideas and put them into action. We’ve added a link on the Legislative Platform tab of the IEA website and it takes you to the written step-by-step instructions that have been part of this podcast. Remember, this is your Legislative Platform, created by IEA members, and adjusted by IEA members just like you and me.

08:48 *Kelsey:* Thanks so much for being with us, Ben. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the Podcast page on the IEA Website.

08:56 *Diana:* Special thanks to Mark for the audio help, Amanda for the transcription, and Dan for the website. As always, thanks so much for being a member, and thanks for joining us!

09:05 *End*