**IEA Awesome Podcast**

**Episode 14 – State Education Accountability System/IBAM**

00:01 *Kelsey:* Welcome *to* the AWESOME IEA Podcast brought to you by the Illinois Education Association.

00:07 Diana: The podcast for curious well-informed association members.

00:10 *Kelsey:* I’m one of your hosts, Kelsey Harms, a Computer Specialist from the IEA Program Development Department.

00:15 *Diana:* And I’m Diana Zaleski, one of your Instructional Resource and Professional Development Directors from IEA Teaching and Learning.

00:21 *Kelsey:* The goal of this podcast is to educate our members about important new educational policy initiatives in a brief and *hopefully* entertaining format.

00:30 *Diana:* Today we are going to updates concerning our state education accountability system. Then, we will air a special interview with Larry Frank, IEA Director of Educational Policy and Research, regarding the Illinois Balanced Accountability Committee.

00:44 *Kelsey:*  To start us off, Diana, can you remind me how the state measures school performance and how this impacts schools?

00:50 *Diana:* Definitely. So, the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, require each state to develop their own state plan that includes a new or updated accountability system. This year has been the first year of implementation. The accountability system is a set of policies and practices the state, specifically the Illinois State Board of Education, uses to measure and hold schools and districts accountable for the achievement of all students.

01:15 The accountability system has two parts. First, a process for measuring and communicating expectations for school performance. Second, the actions low performing schools must take to increase achievement, and the distribution of state resource to support those actions.

01:30 *Kelsey:*  Diana, can you tell us more about how school performance will be measured?

01:33 *Diana:* Yes, I certainly can. So, school performance is measured using traditional academic indicators including math, English language arts, and science proficiency, as well as English learner proficiency, and high school graduation rate. These indicators are weighted to account for a majority, or 75 percent, of a school’s accountability rating.

01:53 *Kelsey:*  And, can you tell us more about the school quality indicators?

01:54 *Diana:* Yes, the school quality indicators are a new component of our state accountability system. So, these are pretty interesting. We’re going to talk a little bit more about those today as well. So, the school quality indicators will also be collected. But, these indicators only account for 25 percent of the school’s accountability rating.

02:12 These indicators include chronic absenteeism and a school climate survey for both elementary and high school. In addition, high school has a ninth grade on track indicator. As you may remember from a previous podcast where we talked about ESSA, the state did propose additional school quality indicators and I have, again, an update for you on those indicators today.

02:33 So, based on the outcome of the accountability system, schools would be placed in one of four tiers. So, exemplary schools, commendable schools, underperforming schools, and lowest performing schools.

02:45 These tiers are referred to a school summative designation. And, the summative designation for each school can be found on the Illinois State Board of Education website and we will post a link to that website on the podcast page.

02:59 *Kelsey:*  Diana, can you remind me again how these readings will affect schools?

03:03 *Diana:* So, both underperforming and lowest performing schools will be required to complete a needs assessment and develop local school improvement plans in collaboration with teachers and paraprofessionals to receive support from the state.

03:16 The local school board then approves plans for underperforming schools, and the local school board and state approve plans for the lowest performing schools. The most important thing for our members to know is that representation from their local association, ideally teachers and education support professionals, must be involved in these important conversations about school improvement.

03:37 *Kelsey:*  Thanks so much for that recap. What updates do you have for our members today?

03:41 *Diana:* So, again, I’d like to talk about these additional school quality indicators. So, again, as you may remember, the state proposed a college and career readiness indicator, an elementary and middle grades indicator, in other words, grades three through eight indicator, and a P2 indicator.

03:58 So, the college and career readiness indicator is proposed as a multi-measure indicator that takes into account things like GPA, SAT scores, courses completed, such as Algebra 2, school attendance, employment, and community service.

04:12 At this time, the state has not indicated how it plans to implement this proposed measure, or what the actual measures within the indicator are going to be. However, this indicator is slated to take effect during the 2021 school year.

04:26 In addition, the work groups assigned to determine the elementary and middle school indicator and a P2 indicator, could not determine a unique measure that met the requirements of ESSA. Therefore, these work groups proposed that additional weight be given to chronic absenteeism indicator. At this time, the state has not indicated how it plans to handle these proposed indicators, either. But, they are still slated to take effect during the 2021 school year.

04:52 *Kelsey:*  So, I know there was also a recommendation to have a fine arts indicator. Has there been any movement on that?

04:58 *Diana:* That’s a great question because that’s a work group that has been working very hard over the course of this school year. So, the fine arts indicator work group proposed another multipart measure that includes the number of students enrolled in fine arts courses, the number of teachers who hold appropriate licenses to teach fine arts courses, and a student survey.

05:19 They also proposed that schools who are currently underfunded would not be held accountable for this indicator until the 2022 school year. The state is currently collecting public comment on this proposal. However, the Illinois Balanced Accountability Committee did not recommend that ISBE adopt this proposal.

05:37 So, at this time, this proposed indicator is still slated to take effect during the 2021 school year but, the state has indicated that it might not be a weighted indicator. So, in other words, this would not affect a school’s summative designation.

05:50 If our members would like to share public comment about their opinions about the fine arts indicator, we will include a link on how to do that on the podcast page as well.

06:00 *Kelsey:* So, Diana, it sounds like chronic absenteeism is currently one of the primary school quality indicators. Especially, if the state decides not to implement the proposed indicators we just discussed. Can you share more with us about chronic absenteeism?

06:14 *Diana*: Yes, that is correct. So, chronic absenteeism is currently weighted as 20 percent of the overall state accountability plan for elementary schools and 7.5 percent for high schools. But, of course, as you stated, this could change depending on what indicators come into play over the course of the next few years.

06:31 So, chronic absenteeism is defined by the state as the percentage of students in a school having 10 percent or more of excused and unexcused absences in the prior academic year. Chronic absenteeism is an early warning sign of academic risk and school dropout. So, while the causes of chronic absenteeism are multifaceted, chronic and acute health conditions play a big role.

06:54 Research indicates that chronic conditions that result in missed school include asthma, diabetes, seizure disorders, and mental health disorders. And acute conditions include oral health issues, influenza, and vision problems. So, these students are more likely to miss school because of the symptoms of their illness or because they are receiving medical treatment during the school day.

07:13 This results in significant negative academic outcomes for students. For example, research shows that children that are chronically absent in both Kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to be reading at grade level by the third grade. And, students that are not reading at grade level by the grade are, in turn, four times more likely to drop out of high school. So this is why this indicator is so important.

07:35 *Kelsey:* So, chronic absenteeism sounds like a big problem. What can we do about this problem?

07:40 *Diana*: It is a big problem but a lot of the work we’ve been doing around adverse childhood experiences is directly related to the work we can do around chronic absenteeism. So, partnering with community healthcare providers to create integrated school health services is a great first step for schools struggling with chronic absenteeism today. And, there is support in the Every Student Succeeds Act to create these integrated school health services.

08:05 In addition, integrated health services ensure that appropriate physical and mental health services are easily accessible to children and their families. And, having a full time school nurse can also lead to improved symptom management and lead to fewer absences.

08:19 So, this indicator also aligns well with IEA’s Partnership for Resilience which some of members might be familiar with, which brings educators, doctors, and social services together to address childhood trauma. So, we’re going to have a link for the Partnership for Resilience website on the podcast page as well as additional resources concerning what we can do as members about chronic absenteeism and integrated school services.

08:43 *Kelsey:* Diana, do you have additional updates for our members?

08:47 *Diana:* Not today. But, we will definitely have more updates soon. So, I do want our members to remember to make their voices heard when it comes to school improvement efforts in their communities. So, if your school falls in either the underperforming or lowest performing categories, teachers and education support professionals representing your local association must be involved in the development of your school improvement plan. Please contact your local UniServ Director if you have questions or require additional support in that area.

09:16 *Kelsey:* Great. Thank you so much, Diana. Up next, you’re going to hear our special interview with Larry Frank about the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure Committee that we referenced earlier in the podcast.

09:25 *Diana:* Today we’re going to discuss the role of the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure Committee, or IBAM, in the development of our state accountability system with our special guest, Larry Frank, IEA Director or Educational Policy. Larry, thanks so much for coming back on the podcast.

09:39 *Larry:* Well, you’re welcome. I’m always happy to here.

09:42 *Kelsey:* Larry, first, can you why the IBAM Committee was created and what organizations are represented on the committee?

09:49 *Larry:* oh, what a great question. So, if you back up to about 2013, the management alliance, the group made up of the Illinois Association of School Administrators, the Illinois Principals Association, Illinois Association of School Business Officials, and the Illinois Association of School Boards came out with a vision, apaper, proposal for legislation that was called a framework for accountability. Which really, eventually, leads to IBAM.

10:16 So, the notion behind the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measures was that we wanted to look at schools, or this group proposed, looking at schools and reducing the amount of assessment, evaluation used for schools and teachers that was related to student testing. So, their idea was they would look at areas of school culture climate, leadership, shared leadership, governance, education and employee quality, and family and community connections, family and community involvement.

10:45 And, what they proposed was using 30 percent of the evaluation to look at student performance metrics, teaching and testing metrics. And, 70 percent to look at these other areas inside the school to say, well, how is school, for example, communicating with parents? Do they involve parents? Do the parents feel good about coming in?

11:04 Are teachers provided professional development? Right? Is leadership shared? So, does the classroom teacher have a voice in the curriculum that’s developed inside that school, inside that district? Does the classroom teacher have a voice in aligning the curriculum across the district? So, the whole notion behind bringing forward this Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure actually did come out originally from the school management folks.

11:28 They came to us, then, as the teacher unions, IEA and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, and asked if we’d join them in an effort to put this in place. So, that’s really the genesis of the idea. And, then, I think they ran it as a bill, or tried to run it as a bill in 13, it didn’t go well, 14 it went better. Finally, it effectively became law in June of 2015.

11:52 *Diana:* So, how is IBAM’s work influenced by No Child Left Behind? Was it a response to No Child Left Behind? Was it a response to what they perceived as perhaps failures in our old accountability system?

12:06 *Larry:* Very much so. A lot of the rationale for constructing the measure the way it was constructed, 30 percent based on test schools, 70 percent based on the other aspects of the school, was in the exact opposite of No Child Left Behind, right, which basically looked at testing students, you know, achievement testing, and then sorted schools and really punished schools based on how they did with the student testing.

12:32 So, one of the conversations that we had was as we worked this through and eventually put it into law, was, you know, there’s some districts that are situated such that they’re pretty much always going to be in the bottom five percent, or ten percent, or there’s always a subgroup that’s going to be in that bottom percent because the families that live there and the students that come out of those families and bring to school so many challenges, just without all kinds of additional help are not going to be able to break out of that bottom five or ten percent in terms of performance. They are so far behind when they start school that that notion that catching them up given our sort of current practice is just impractical, it just isn’t going to happen.

13:11 So, this was very much an effort that was aimed at putting in place a state accountability system that would be become effective just about the time No Child Left Behind, or the Elementary Secondary Education Act, ran out. And, of course, we didn’t know at that time if the federal government would re-up the act, refund it, you know, if there would be any follow on to No Child Left Behind.

13:33 And, so, ironically, just as this law goes into effect, and it says, okay, for Illinois schools, we’re going to have this as our assessment metric and it will be based on 30 percent achievement scores, 70 percent other measures of schools success. The federal government reauthorizes ESSA, and, as we know now, comes up with a set of rules that turn out to be quite different from what was in the statute.

14:01 So, it is still true, ironically, that the federal ESSA requirements and Illinois’ federal ESSA plan are in direct conflict with the statute that we have for our state assessment plan, so that’s one that currently conveniently overlook. I mean, there’s, as with many laws in the school code, okay, so this is a law under school standards, I think in section two of the code. And, I mean, it’s in a sense unenforceable, right?

14:29 I suppose the state board of education could say that, okay, any district who is using ESSA accountability system and is not using IBAM as it is written in the code, is in violation of the code and is therefore we’re not going to recognize them as a school district. Well, that would be pretty silly.

14:45 So, there are currently two laws on the books that disagree, but that’s sort of been the next iteration of IBAM, is once ESSA came out and was put in place, then the committee went back to work to think about how do we fit IBAM inside the ESSA framework.

15:01 *Diana:* So, just to briefly clarify for our members, ESSA is the reauthorization of, meaning, the Every Student Succeeds Act.

15:08 *Larry:* Correct, which has been in place for years. I mean, there have been several iterations, sort of, No Child Left Behind, you know, was kind of an ugly one, and then that was Bush two that came out and said we’re really going to…in theory, the treatment wasn’t bad. The notion was, let’s identify the schools that need the most help and get the resource to them to help them.

15:29 Now, in fact, how those resources were assigned to schools, the amount of resources that the schools got and some of the hoops they had to jump through to even deploy their resources pretty much cause that, at least in the view of school leaders and our teachers, to be an unsuccessful attempt to help schools and kids.

15:46 *Kelsey:* So, Larry, you’ve talked about, kind of, how IBAM was created and how it’s kind of in conflict with the Every Student Succeeds Act. Is IBAM’s purpose kind of evolving over time? Or, what’s kind of the work of IBAM going forward?

16:01 *Larry:* So, once ESSA passes, IBAM had been meeting. They were working, the committee was working to develop a rubric, which would employ the various domains that I talked about. And, the rubric was designed then to have a series of measurements. So, if you looked at, for instance, the shared governance, right? There was a section on, sort of, what happens at the district level, what’s happening at the school level.

16:25 The aim of the rubric in the at section was to say, okay, is the community involved as they should be in governance? Are the decisions that are made at the central office inclusive? Do teachers have a voice there? Do principals have a voice? You know, does the board and the superintendent governing function include those voices or are they just ignored?

16:43 And, look, did things like, does the district write down policy, right, because, I’ve learned over that we can go into a district and say, “What’s your policy?” “Well, it’s this.” “Can you show me that?” “Well, we never wrote it down.” Well, okay, fine. So, there’s a difference between paying attention to detail and putting policies in a place and just saying well, this is our policy.

17:01 So, the committee’s job then became once ESSA was put in place, was to sort of back up and say, can we essentially rework the rubric. Can you take the basic concepts that drove the balanced accountability measure and adjust them so they can be used inside the ESSA framework to assess schools?

17:19 Now the answer is of course, right? The fight, if you want to call it that, became over how much of the ESSA measure was going to driven and then ultimately the sort of scoring and identification of schools that need help, how much of that was going to be based on student achievement and how much was going to be based on these other measures?

17:38 Because at its heart, IBAM was designed to look at things inside the school as being more important than standardized testing of students. The whole IBAM thinking sort of revolved around if we can get the process in place, then student achievement will follow.

17:55 Which is a fairly logical assumption. I think one that is, at least to some extent by the research, that’s a fight that in many ways IBAM lost. We had a governor at the time that decided that the ESSA measures should probably be 95 percent student testing metrics and five percent other stuff.

18:12 The State Superintendent Tony Smith claimed victory in coming back with 25 percent of the measure school scores, district scores, being the balanced accountability factors and 75 percent being student testing. So, yes, the job of the committee changed very much.

18:29 Now, this sort of central job of sort of figuring out how do you develop a rubric and a framework to access schools using these ideas didn’t change. Probably the latest part to be added is the idea of equity because the committee had pretty much finished its work, had a framework in place, had a rubric to assess the framework has a, and this is all the state board’s website if you want to go look, there is sort of an instruction manual that sort of talks about what sort of data would you collect for each of these pieces of the framework and then the rubric talks about how to judge that data and determine the rating that the district gets for that particular metric.

19:06 The work was pretty much done. The group had sort of come together and said, yes, we’re finished and we had a district superintendent that came to the group and said, wait a minute, what about student equity? We think that in our community we have lots of Latino students and we worry that they don’t get the same opportunities that a kid does in a school that is majority white, quite honestly.

19:28 And, we’re working at that. But, it’s an important thing to remember. And, everyone said, of course, if that’s not included enough, the committee has just, I say we, I staff the committee for us. I’m now a member. Mary Jane Morris and Karl Goeke, Karl teaches up in Unit 5, Mary Jane is one of our mangers here at the IEA.

19:47 *Diana:* So, under the Every Student Succeeds Act, there were some discussions about requiring districts that would like to access the IL-EMPOWER resources through the state that they would need to use the IBAM rubric to access those resources. Is that still the plan?

20:06 *Larry:* Yes, so the access, the rating of schools at this point is pretty much driven by student test scores. So, if your school is in the bottom five percent of all the schools in the state with all the subgroups, or if you have an identifiable subgroup of students who are in the bottom five percent, then your school is eligible for help through IL-EMPOWER.

20:28 Part of that is completing the IBAM assessment. And, that is looked at and I think will become an increasingly important part. You may know for example that Secretary Devos released a memo in November or December I think it was, saying that states had a window until about mid March to file amended ESSA plans with the federal government. So, there is a move afoot, and IBAM has made the recommendation to the state board, and I think the state board will vote on this at their February meeting, that we should go back and ask that 51 percent of Illinois ESSA measure will be based on student testing and 49 percent be based on the other factors, which would be the IBAM framework.

21:09 The federal law says that a significant part needs to be based on student performance and testing and 51 percent is a significant part. So, that recommendation is in to the state board so we’ll see what they do at their February meeting.

21:22 *Diana:* So, it sounds like IBAM is still a key player in the development of our state accountability system. So, why is it important for IEA to have staff and members on this committee and other committees like it through the state?

21:38 *Larry:* I think at this point, I mean, the basic work is done in terms of the IBAM framework. Now, one of the open questions is, if we’re successful in moving 49 percent of the total metric into school factors, there’s a relatively small number of non-student test metrics that are included in the ESSA framework right now.

21:59 A lot of people are concerned that chronic absenteeism, for example, counts for too much of the non-test metric, so I know the Illinois Arts Alliance currently is in front of the state board, in fact, has a proposal in that is now out for a 30 day comment period, proposing arts indicators.

22:17 So, they’d like to look at school districts and say, well, how many of the kids are taking an arts course. As a quality measure, how many of the art courses are taught by someone who is endorsed on their professional educator license to teach the arts. And, then eventually they’d like to include the student voice although, the student voice thing is not yet defined and they’re saying maybe five years down the road.

22:38 Hey, another thing about the IBAM Committee, sort of and ongoing, one of the, and I’ll use the word interesting to describe it, things we have going in Illinois right now is several almost competing accountability measures. Right, we have the ESSA accountability measure. The balanced accountability measure is sort of a subset of that but feeds into ESSA but is in fact separate, right, and includes the five essentials survey to get an idea of teachers’ voice and put student voice and put parent voice into what’s happening inside that school.

23:07 You’ve got the Illinois Report Card which, according to federal law, has to report certain ESSA measures but includes a lot of other state measures. Illinois has over the last ten years since we’ve had that report card, continued to get awards at the national level for how the report card works. There’s an interactive piece that Northern Illinois University continues to manage and it really is a terrific piece machinery, if you will, in terms of data and digging down and looking at the school level, you know, what’s happening in your child’s school or as a teacher, what’s happening in your school.

23:42 Then, we also have, we’re in the third year of the evidenced-based funding model and part of the statute that enabled that sets up this thing called a professional review panel that’s supposed to recommend to the state board an accountability system that looks at how districts are spending their money. Additionally, every year there are conversations in the General Assembly about how do we hold schools accountable, what other measures do we have to put in place?

24:07 So, it’s an interesting time, right, all over the United States, but certainly here in Illinois, because we have all these multiple sort of accountability measures that are stacked on schools and then we get into what is the accountability for the teachers? How does PERA work, how does Senate Bill 7 that was put in place you know for teacher evaluations inside the schools.

24:27 So, yeah, I think IBAM will continue. I think that work is going to ongoing until we finally sort out a single accountability system that takes care of all the needs in the schools. And, I think that is such a broad ranging, diverse sort of issue that I doubt I’ll see that one resolved in my professional lifetime.

24:46 *Diana:* It sounds like it’s really important that IEA has staff and members on all of these committees, in particular, the Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure Committee to make sure our members are informed and that they’re ideas and feedback is relayed to these committees through IEA.

25:04 *Larry:* I think that is very true, Diana. I think one of the most fascinating things we’ve seen over the last four or five years is, in a couple of areas of education work, is the various stakeholders coming together sort of checking the organizational baggage at the door and having honest conversations about what’s good for kids and what’s good for teachers.

25:22 And, I think the Balanced Accountability Measure Committee has been an example of that. It’s just been fun to watch. It’s interesting to listen to the members talk about the fact that this is a place they can come and have honest conversations about what works. It’s just interesting to watch school management, teacher unions, you know, and some of the reform groups come to the table and work together and sort of leave the political agenda outside and come together as a group often to argue with the state board and the General Assembly about putting in place, in this case, measurements that are going to be good for our teachers.

25:57 So, yeah, we need to keep members on this, stay engaged to be sure that the teacher voice is at the table.

26:03 *Kelsey:* How can our member provide feedback on any of the proposed rules and amendments related to the state accountability plan?

26:09 *Larry:* The state board does a good job of tracking the IBAM meetings and putting up minutes in a timely manner. So, if you just go to the state board’s website, isbe.net, search for Illinois Balanced Accountability Measure you can find the homepage.

26:24 You can always read through the minutes and know what the committee is working on and often if there are changes being made directly to drafts of things. Those will be posted and people can see them.

26:33 I would say, as a member, if you go to that source and you have questions about what is going on, you should certainly feel free to contact Mary Jane, Maryjane.morris@ieanea.org, or you can drop me an email if you’d like, larry.frank@ieanea.org and we’ll try to answer your question. If you have suggestions we’ll try to get those into the room.

26:52 *Kelsey:* So, Larry we will make sure and try to include links to some relevant resource on how our members can provide that comment, questions, or feedback and we’ll include your email address and Mary Jane’s in the show notes section of the podcast page.

27:05 *Diana:* Do you have anything else that you think would be important to tell our members about IBAM or anything else going on about state accountability at this time?

27:12 *Larry:* I just reinforce the notion that if folks have questions or if they have ideas, please let us know about them.

27:18 *Diana:* That sounds great. Thanks so much for coming on our podcast again. If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please check out the contact section on the podcast page on the IEA Website.

27:28 *Kelsey:* 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!

27:39 *End*