



# INDIANA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

## Graduation Pathways Panel Members' Biographies

### **Caryl Auslander, Vice President of Education and Workforce Development Policy, Indiana Chamber of Commerce**

Caryl Auslander joined the Indiana Chamber at the end of 2014 with more than 15 years of legislative and lobbying experience at the state and federal levels. She came to the Chamber after nearly five years at The Corydon Group, where she represented more than 60 clients. During that time, she worked with a variety of organizations engaged in K-12 and higher education. Auslander's extensive background includes time as state director of government affairs for Verizon Communications and legislative policy specialist with the Washington, D.C. law firm Patton Boggs, LLP. She also spent four years as public policy/regulatory specialist for the American Association of Blood Banks. Her first experience in state government was as an intern for former Senate President Pro Tempore Robert Garton. Auslander followed that up with three years on the Washington, D.C. staff of former U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar – the final two as assistant legislative director. An Indianapolis native, she graduated with a double major and double minor from Indiana University Bloomington.

### **Jason Bearce, Senior Associate Commissioner, Indiana Commission for Higher Education**

As Senior Associate Commissioner for Strategy & External Affairs, Jason Bearce serves as a policy adviser to the state's higher education commissioner and directs the agency's communication strategy, outreach efforts and student success initiatives. Bearce's policy contributions have included overseeing the development of the Commission's strategic plan and spearheading reforms to Indiana's 21st Century Scholars program in an effort to increase college and career readiness for Hoosier students. Bearce previously served as staff liaison for Indiana's Education Roundtable and held leadership positions at the Indiana Department of Education as communications director and policy adviser. Bearce's perspective on education reform and student success is informed by his experience as a Starfish Initiative mentor, his tenure as board president for a local middle/high school and his marriage to an elementary school teacher. Bearce earned a bachelor's degree from Purdue University and an MBA from Western Governors University.

### **Representative Bob Behning (R-91), Chair, Indiana House of Representatives Education Committee**

Rep. Bob Behning has served in the Indiana State Legislature since 1992 and represents House District 91, including Marion and Hendricks counties. Throughout his tenure as a representative, he has advocated for education reform in Indiana. As Chair of the House Committee on Education, he led efforts to pass the most comprehensive education reform package in the United States. Rep. Behning believes all parents deserve the right to choose the school that best meets their child's needs. In 2017, Rep. Behning championed



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legislation to provide more at-risk, low-income 4-year-olds access to high-quality pre-K. Now, 20 counties in Indiana are a part of the On My Way Pre-K pilot program. Additionally, Rep. Behning authored legislation replacing the state's troubled ISTEP exam with ILEARN. Outside of his legislative role, Rep. Behning is also very involved in a number of community activities. Through years of experience, knowledge and passion, Rep. Behning fundamentally strengthened Indiana's K-12 education system and put tools in place that will equip Indiana students with a high quality education to prepare them for success.

## **Angie Crabtree, Parent and Professor, Vincennes University**

STEP Director and Professor Angie Crabtree joined the faculty in the 2012-13 school year after working at Vincennes University for ten years. She holds degrees from Vincennes University, Indiana State University, and a Master of Science from the University of Evansville. Crabtree has worked with individuals with learning disabilities, support groups, and in the Knox County community. She teaches STEP and Study Skills Classes. She is the proud parent of three children – her eldest son is 25 and a college graduate; her middle son is 21 and has earned his Associates Degree at Vincennes; and her youngest son is 18 and senior Lincoln High School.

## **Dr. Byron Ernest, Chair, Graduation Pathways Panel, and Secretary, State Board of Education**

Dr. Byron Ernest is a former (2010) Indiana "Teacher of the Year" and currently serves as Head of Schools for Hoosier Academies in Indiana. Previously, Dr. Ernest served as principal at Emmerich Manual High School in Indianapolis after it was taken over by the State for receiving seven consecutive failing annual performance grades. As principal, Dr. Ernest developed a new staff and culture of excellence focusing on high student achievement and performance. The State removed Manual off the "F" list under Dr. Ernest's leadership and still holds the distinction of being the only takeover school in Indiana to be removed from the failing category. Dr. Ernest holds Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and Agricultural Education and a Master's in Education from Purdue University. He received his Doctorate from Walden University in Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning. Currently, Dr. Ernest is completing Post-Doctoral Professional Programs in Leadership at Harvard University. Dr. Ernest serves as Secretary to the SBOE. He was appointed to the Indiana State Board of Education by House Speaker Brian Bosma (R-Indianapolis).

## **John Elcesser, Executive Director, Indiana Non-Public Education Association**

John Elcesser has spent the past 37 years in leadership positions in private schools. He holds a Bachelor Degree from West Virginia University and Master Degree from Marshall University of Graduate Studies in Education Administration. He has served as a Catholic elementary & high school principal, Assistant Superintendent, and Superintendent of Schools for two Catholic Dioceses (Diocese of Richmond VA and Diocese of Wheeling- Charleston WV). Ten years ago he came to Indianapolis to serve



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as Executive Director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA), where he advocates for and provides support and guidance to over 400 private schools in Indiana. In his role with INPEA, he works closely with Indiana legislators, the Department of Education and the State Board of Education on education issues impacting non-public schools. As a product of both public and private schools, Elcesser is committed to promoting quality in schools serving all education sectors in Indiana.

## **Dr. David Freitas, Member, State Board of Education**

Dr. David Freitas was appointed to the SBOE by Governor Mike Pence. Freitas earned an Ed.D. and an M.Ed. in Educational Leadership from Boston University; B.M.Ed. from Boston Conservatory of Music and has also completed post-doctoral work at Harvard University Law School. Dr. Freitas has served higher education for more than 30 years including roles as University Vice Provost, Dean of Education at four universities, and Dean of the Schools of Business, Fine Arts, and Technology. In his 25 years as a Tenured Full Professor of Educational Leadership, he has prepared and mentored more than 1000 school principals, superintendents, and other educational leaders. Dr. Freitas has held professional licensure for K-12 teaching, elementary principal, secondary principal and superintendent, and served as a member of the State of Illinois Teacher Certification Board; as an elected city school board member in Massachusetts; consultant to the U.S. Department of Education; President of Illinois Association of Teacher Education; and President of Commonwealth of Massachusetts Teacher Education Consortium.

## **Jana Goebel, Director of College & Academic Services and Special Education Coordinator, Irvington Preparatory Academy**

Jana Goebel currently serves as the Director of College & Academic Services and Special Education Coordinator at Irvington Preparatory Academy. Irvington Preparatory Academy (IPA) is a public charter school on the east side of Indianapolis. IPA is a part of Irvington Community Schools which serves students in grades K - 12. As Director of College & Academic Services, Goebel's primary roles are to monitor student graduation progress, build and manage the master schedule, assist students with all aspects of the college application and financial aid process, coordinate AP and dual credit courses, and provide academic counseling. In her role as Special Education Coordinator, Goebel monitors all areas of compliance, provides training to teachers and assists with special cases as needed. Prior to her current positions at IPA, Goebel served as a special education teacher of record in grades 2-12, directed a cooperative preschool, and worked in children's ministry.

## **Vanessa Johnson, Science Teacher, Perry Central Jr.-Sr. High School**

Vanessa Johnson is currently teaching chemistry, Anatomy & Physiology, and PLTW Biomedical Science classes at Perry Central Jr.-Sr. High School. Johnson received her Bachelors in Science Education from the University of Southern Indiana and her Master's in Education from Oakland City University. Currently, she is taking graduate chemistry classes from Illinois State University for dual credit eligibility. Johnson is the Co-President of Perry Central's Classroom Teacher Association (CTA) and a member of the Indiana State Teachers



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Association (ISTA). In addition, Johnson is a member of National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) and American Association of Chemistry Teachers (AACT). Johnson lives in rural Tell City with her husband Jeff and their 14 year old son, Cole.

## **Senator Dennis Kruse (R-14), Chair, Indiana Senate Education and Career Development Committee**

Sen. Dennis Kruse has represented Hoosiers from Northeast Indiana at the Statehouse for 28 years. He served in the Indiana House of Representatives from 1989 to 2004, and was elected to the Senate in 2004, where he continues to serve today as the Senate Education and Career Development Chairman. As a state senator, Sen. Kruse represents District 14, which includes portions of DeKalb and Allen counties. Sen. Kruse is an auctioneer and owner of Dennis Kruse & Associates. He served as president of the National Auctioneers Association from 2005 to 2006, and was inducted into the national hall of fame in 2013. Through the years, Sen. Kruse has been honored with numerous awards for his civic service. He has been named Legislator of the Year from various organizations, such as the Indiana School Counselors Association in 2013, the National Federation of Independent Business in 2010, the Indiana Aviation Association in 2006 and the Mothers Against Drunk Driving in 1996 and in 2015. In 2012, he received an honorary doctorate from Harrison College and an honorary degree from Ivy Tech Community College in 2016.

## **Beth Meguschar, Associate Chief Operating Officer for Workforce Education and Training, Department of Workforce Development**

Beth Meguschar currently serves as Associate Chief Operating Officer for Workforce Education and Training with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. She joined the DWD in May following a longtime career in education and has served in school administration for the last decade, most recently as Assistant Principal at Noblesville High School, where she oversaw curriculum and instruction, helped to build a number of CTE programs with local industry and also collaborated with the internship coordinator to build the largest internship program in Indiana. Before joining Noblesville's administrative team in 2011, she served as principal at Clinton Central Jr/Sr High. Most of her professional career was spent at Lawrence Central High School, where she was first English teacher, then district literacy coach and finally Assistant Principal until 2010.

## **Dr. Jennifer McCormick, Superintendent of Public Instruction**

Dr. Jennifer McCormick is a nationally recognized innovator and leader in education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction for Indiana. Over the course of nearly two decades, Dr. McCormick has served at every level of the traditional public education system. Starting in the classroom as a special education teacher and later as a Middle School Language Arts teacher (1996-2004), Dr. McCormick became the Principal of Yorktown Elementary School (2004-2007). She went on to become the Assistant Superintendent of Yorktown Community Schools from 2007-2010 before she was



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elevated to Superintendent in 2010. Dr. McCormick served as Secretary of the Board for Ivy Tech East Central Region. Dr. McCormick's work as an education innovator was recognized nationally in 2014 when she was invited to the White House to participate in "The National Connected Superintendents Summit." She is the recipient of the Outstanding Contributor to Education Award from the Muncie Delaware County Chamber of Commerce and was named Person of the Year by the Yorktown Chamber of Commerce in 2013.

## **Alan Taylor, Director of Career and Technical Education, Prosser Career Education Center**

As the Director of Career and Technical Education, Alan Taylor is responsible for overseeing all high school career and technical education programs within CTE District 45. In addition to operating one of the largest stand-alone career centers in the state, Prosser Career Center, Taylor assists District 45 schools establish new career programs, monitors state and federal CTE funding, approves CTE teacher licensing, and provides leadership to increase all CTE core indicators of student performance. Taylor has been involved in secondary education for 29 years, previously serving as teacher, coach, assistant principal and principal. He holds a B.S. in Industrial Technology from Indiana State University and an M.S. in Secondary Education from Indiana University Southeast. He earned his Principal's certification from Indiana University Southeast and his Director of Career and Technical Education certification from Indiana State University. Taylor served as President of the Indiana Association of Career and Technical Education Districts and was recognized by Louisville Business First as one of the *20 People to Know in Education and Workforce Development*.

## **B. J. Watts, State Board of Education**

B. J. Watts is a 6th Grade Social Studies and Science Teacher at Vogel Elementary in Evansville. Originally from Scottsburg, he is a graduate of the University of Southern Indiana where he was a member of the basketball team, and received his M.Ed. from Indiana Wesleyan University. Watts is a member of the Evansville Teachers Association (ETA), Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA), and a member of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) Governmental Affairs Committee. He currently serves as the Assistant Girls Track Coach at Evansville F. J. Reitz High School, and is a former member of both the Mayor's Education Round Table (2004-2010) and the Evansville City Council from 2001-2012, including five and a half years as council president. Watts is also an Evansville business owner, and a Licensed Insurance Broker with Freeman, Will & Niemeier, Inc. He was appointed to the SBOE by Governor Mike Pence.