

July 24, 2017

Senator Young
Senate Russell B33
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Young,

First of all, I hope this letter finds you well and know your service to Indiana is appreciated. Secondly, the purpose of this letter is to inform the Indiana Congressional Delegation of a recent decision made by the United States Department of Education (USED). The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) recently learned from USED Indiana must change the way we calculate graduation rates. Under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all states must calculate graduation rate based upon the diploma earned by the “preponderance of students.” In addition to the type of diploma earned by the preponderance of students, any diploma deemed of higher rigor may also be included in the graduation rate. In Indiana, that definition encompasses our Core 40 Diploma, Core 40 with Academic Honors Diploma, Core 40 with Technical Honors Diploma, and the International Baccalaureate Diploma.

However, in addition to the aforementioned diploma types, Indiana also awards a General Diploma to roughly 8,000 students each graduating year. Given the USED now excludes these graduates in Indiana’s calculated graduation rate, it puts Indiana in a concerning national disadvantage. Indiana’s graduation rate will be greatly impacted. For example, the 2016 cohort group will fall from 89.1% to 76.5%. This percentage does not reflect well upon our state and could negatively impact our economy. Granted, the state has much room to improve our overall graduation rate, and we certainly are committed to push all students to academic capacity while embracing high rigor.

The drastic drops in graduation rates statewide and at the local district level will also negatively impact school accountability grades. This drastic drop in graduation rate due to a simple, federal definition change will cause confusion, reflect poorly upon all of our communities and our state, and could result in decreased emphasis placed upon those students who may not achieve at least a Core 40 Diploma.

We have been communicating with USED about our concerns, but we would welcome your assistance. Your advocacy on behalf of Indiana students, schools, employers, and communities can make a difference. If you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me at 317-232-6610.

Respectfully,



Dr. Jennifer McCormick
Superintendent of Public Instruction