New Indiana law gives governor more control over education policy

Starting in 2021, North Dakota and Wisconsin will be the only two Midwestern states with chief state school officers elected by voters. Indiana legislators accelerated their state’s switch in governance structure with this year’s HB 1005 [2], which replaces the position of school superintendent in two years with a governor-appointed secretary of education. (The change had been scheduled to take effect in 2025.)

Gov. Eric Holcomb says the move will make plain to Hoosiers that he and future governors are responsible for administering education policy and should be held accountable for the results. According to the Education Commission of the States [3], three governors in the Midwest already appoint the top chief school officer in their respective states: Iowa, Minnesota and South Dakota. (Senate confirmation of the appointments is required in each state.)

In Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska and Ohio, the state’s chief school officer is appointed by a board of education. Voters in Kansas, Michigan and Nebraska elect members of these state boards. In Illinois, the governor appoints the members, with confirmation required by the state Senate. Ohio’s State Board of Education is a mix of elected and appointed members.

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