

SOS Reporter

“ Save Our Schools By Supporting Our Schools “

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EDUCATIONAL ISSUES NEWSLETTER

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IPS' big gamble: smaller is better

Largest overhaul of its kind in U.S. will begin today
KIM L. HOOPER KIM.HOOPER@INDYSTAR.COM

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Students returning to Indianapolis Public Schools classes today are stepping into one of the biggest educational experiments in the country.

IPS is carving its five high schools into 24 small academies in a sweeping bid to boost test scores and improve abysmal graduation rates.

The wholesale overhaul is the largest of its kind in the nation and one that state officials will watch closely as they consider similar changes for the rest of Indiana's high schools.

“This is a **big** deal,” said new **IPS** Superintendent Eugene G. White. “We have thrown caution to the wind. We've broken the laws of nature.”

The new, smaller schools will open in the district's existing buildings and require no added teachers to run, officials said. Planning for the change has gone on for two years, and teachers have had weeks of training in preparation for the shift.

Each new high school is organized around themes such as health and wellness, science and technology, leadership and the arts, and each will enroll only a few hundred students. Those students will keep the same teachers all four years.

Backers, including billionaire philanthropists Bill and Melinda Gates, say going small is the key to making sure high schools are successful, creating campuses where every student is known by name and no one slips through unnoticed. Just this week, a new Indiana University survey showed as many as 35 percent of high schoolers feel no teacher cares about them.

Bill Gates believes so strongly that smaller is better that the foundation he and his wife support is sinking billions into helping districts make the change. **IPS** is getting more than \$5 million of that, which will go to 21 of the 24 academies. The other three do not qualify for foundation money because they have admission requirements.

Small high schools are already in place in other

states. Ohio is carving 20 large urban schools in 11 cities into 70 smaller schools. Washington state is converting large urban high schools into multiple, smaller academies focused on more personalized learning. And school districts in Baltimore, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and New York are following suit.

In Indiana, Marion County leads the way, with 14 schools



outside **IPS**, including some charter schools, using Gates Foundation money to bankroll small programs.

Supporters of the small high school initiative say research shows student attendance and achievement improve when lessons are personalized. Relationships between teachers and students also benefit.

They expect coursework to be demanding but also that it should connect with students and be taught by teachers who have a strong relationship with their charges. Organizers boil their core goals down to three words: rigor, relevance and relationships.

But it's too soon to say whether the small-schools experiment will lead to improvements. Even skeptics, however, agrees it's time to rethink the form of high school.

“A third of our kids are dropping out, and a third of our kids are graduating without the skills for college or work. In our urban areas, it's worse,” said Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in Seattle.

White isn't asking teachers to become their students' best friends, but he does expect them to be caring

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while still having high expectations.

He said all five high school campuses would eventually offer the tough International Baccalaureate, a diploma so difficult to obtain that it is recognized internationally.

And all **IPS** middle and high schools will participate in the national Advancement Via Individual Determination, a program to help students who would be the first in their families to attend college.

“We’re trying to raise our expectations for what our students can do.”

Rocketing ahead

Planning for the change was well under way in **IPS** before White arrived in July. In fact, as superintendent in Washington Township, he oversaw one of Indiana’s largest high schools, with an enrollment topping 3,300 students: North Central. The effectiveness of that widely respected school made him skeptical of the benefits of downsizing.

But looking at low high school achievement and graduation rates quickly made White willing to embrace this new approach.

“If we keep doing what we’ve been doing, we’re going to keep getting what we’ve been getting,” he said.

Breaking up the old high schools, which operated on a basic design developed in the 1920s that tracked students based on ability, includes restructuring from top to bottom.

Teachers once grouped in departments such as math or social studies are instead teamed with peers in other subjects.

By bringing math, English, science and history teachers together, lessons can gain connections that otherwise might have been missed. For example, students learning about the Civil War in history class can read “The Red Badge of Courage” in English.

“It lets us design a curriculum that’s more engaging and allows teachers to collaborate with each other more than ever before,” said Susan Pattee, a leader for a group of teachers at Broad Ripple High School.

Traditional leadership roles have changed, too.

High school principals, vice principals and department heads have been eliminated.

Now there’s one campus administrator, who oversees all aspects of the large campus, including transportation and discipline. Each academy on a campus will be overseen by an academic dean, with the help of “facilitators of teaching and learning,” administrators with the job of helping teachers become better at what they do by interpreting test results and fine-tuning lessons.

At Broad Ripple, color-coded maps offer a glimpse of how the school has been restructured into four wings. Green represents the Center for Media and Communication; purple, the Center for Health and Wellness; blue, the Center for Arts and Humanities; and yellow, the Center for Science and Technology.

Students in each academy will take all classes together, separate from other students on campus.

Some places, such as the cafeteria and library, are designated campus common areas, just as a college might have one library or student union.

Steve Papesh, once principal at Broad Ripple, is now administrator of the 1,525-student campus.

A sign on his office wall underscores the desperation that underlies the changes and reminds the 89 teachers of their goal:

“If you’re only changing the structure of a school without changing the methods of instruction, you are simply rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.”

Some kids get lost in the shuffle of **big** schools too easily, Papesh said, and the ones who do are more likely to drop out.

“I think the key is going to be the personal contact between students, getting to know them and their families and teachers,” he said. “We don’t teach subjects, we teach kids.”

White, the superintendent, echoes the same theme when he talks about the high schools.

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This Week's SOS Reporter

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Chair: Linda Westergaard • Coordinator: Nancy Stillians
 S.O.S. - Save Our Schools •
 P.O. Box 1358 • WebSite: www.DM-SOS.org
 Des Moines, Ia 50305-1358 • E-Mail: issues@DM-SOS.org

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"Just being small means nothing," he said. "You have to have quality instruction in your program."

Some students worry that a small, tight-knit school will make it harder to forge friendships with a wide range of people.

"Socially, you will only get to meet the same group of people who you have classes with, and that's not good," said Jordan Petty, 17, a Broad Ripple senior. "I'm glad this is my last year."

But they also see hope for academic improvement.

Deep pockets

So does the Gates Foundation, which has doled out \$2.3 billion in education funding, including scholarships, in a commitment to raise high school graduation rates.

The Gates Foundation has given \$11.3 million to the University of Indianapolis Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning to create a network of small schools in Indianapolis. Of that amount, \$5.2 million has been promised to **IPS** for the conversion of its five high schools.

For two years, **IPS** teachers have used the Gates funding for training and planning.

The remainder — about \$6 million — is earmarked for new, small high schools, in Marion County. A Gates stipulation is that the schools not only be small — enrollments not exceeding 400 in Grades 9-12 —

but that they be given freedom in spending, hiring and curriculum. They also must serve students at risk of failing.

The promise of small schools rings true with Nathan Couch, who says he would have benefitted from teachers who cared when he was a high school student five years ago.

He did well in school until he arrived at Manual High School, where he says he became a nameless face in the crowd, never connecting with teachers. Couch passed the state exam required for a diploma his sophomore year, but by the end of his junior year, he'd lost interest in school and quit well short of graduating.

"My attitude was, 'This ain't gonna work.' Academics weren't the problem. Somewhere along the line, I lost the motivation to do what I was supposed to do," said Couch, now 23, who went on to earn his general educational development and works for United Parcel Service.

"What's needed in the classroom are teachers who can show discipline and love to help get students to excel."

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<http://www.indystar.com/apps/pbcs.dll/frontpage>

Under The Radar

To those saying it is too late to save our neighborhood schools, we respond that any perceived crisis is a myth of the School District's making. By keeping their plans secret until the end of May, the School Board sandwiched their proposals between two major three-day weekend holidays and presumed school closings would sail right under the public radar. Our SOS appeal of the school closures before the State Department of Education exposes the School Board's complete and arrogant disregard for appropriate procedure.

Informed Observer

Mark Your Calendars

CANDIDATE FORUMS:

Remaining DM School Board Public Sessions:

SEPT. 7: 6:30 to 8 PM Brody Middle School, 2501 Park Ave. Sponsor: Southwest Hills Neighborhood Association and Des Moines PTA Council forum

SEPT. 8: 7 to 8:30 PM in the cafeteria of North High School, 501 Holcomb Ave. Forum by AMOS, a faith-based organization of 23 churches and temples.

Watch for more dates & Locations as they are confirmed.

Open Letter of Response

by Gayle Murray

As one of the parents who is “draining” the school district’s money by “suing” them...I felt compelled to offer Mr. Ragle some education on which to base his assumptions. We are appealing a decision that was made illegally by the district in which they radically changed the way the local option sales tax monies are being spent. By Iowa law they are not at liberty to make such changes without putting them



to a vote before the public.

Had Mr. Ragle spent countless hours of his life listening to the district’s manipulation over the course of more than a year, at meetings that were reportedly designed to “seek community input” then he might understand why the parents in question decided to hold the administration and board members accountable for the promises they have made and now broken.

If Mr. Ragle had studied the issue a bit further, he might find that the district claiming to be broke is actually spending money hand over fist in schools that have already been completed through the School’s First process and are now receiving additional funds as pet projects of certain board members. Space does not permit a further elaboration of how the district’s spending priorities call into question the financial crisis that they blame the school closures on. For further information on the topic, perhaps Mr. Ragle should subscribe to the SOS Reporter where he can become a more informed citizen.

Benefits of SOS Legal Action:

Despite the School Board’s protestations, it is not too late to consider how to save our neighborhood schools. We are confident the issue will be returned to the School Board with instructions to return to the open hearings, the formal, required, genuine planning procedures be afforded the public before closing neighborhood schools. Because the DM School Board insists it cannot be ready to defend itself in court before September 13, the Mid-Project Proposal it will be returned to a different School Board, one infused with the results of the September 13 election. It is our task to assure that the School Board after the election has the capacity and the wisdom to decide what is in the best interests of our children and has the will to adopt actions commensurate with such wisdom.

Knowledge and Educational Items

109TH CONGRESS (2005-2006)

Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2005 (S.250)

On March 10, 2005 the Senate passed the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2005 - Amends the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1998 (the Act) to reauthorize and revise its programs. Renames the Act the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2005.

Vocational and Technical Education for the Future Act (H.R. 366)

Education Committee Approves Castle Bill to Help States and Schools Improve Vocational and Technical Education, Strengthen Opportunities for Students. The U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce on March 9, 2005 gave bipartisan approval to legislation introduced by Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE).

SmithsonianCenter for Education and Museum Studies

S m i t h s o n i a n E d u c a t i o n <www.smithsonianeducation.org/> is the gateway to education resources at the Smithsonian. Explore web presentations on the Apollo lunar missions, Presidents, collections (coins, stamps, and more). Find lessons for teaching about Ben Franklin, changes in the American office, electing a President, Eskimos, landscape painting, Lewis and Clark, marine science, minerals and gems, money, Native American dolls, shape-note singing, spiders, toads and snakes, and U.S. expansion from 1846-1848. (Smithsonian Institution)

MATH And Science Educational Resources

C l a s s r o o m C o m p a s s <<http://www.sedl.org/scimast/resources/cc.html>> is a collection of activities, and resources for teachers to improve instruction in science and mathematics. Each issue links sample classroom activities with ideas about learning and instruction. It presents examples of instructional activities that illustrate the issue's theme, supported by excerpts from standards-based publications. (Department of Education)

ANOTHER PLAN FOR EDMUNDS

In the last edition of SOS Newsletter, *I read the suggestion that school administrative offices be moved to the Edmunds building. At first, it seemed a bright idea, but upon reflection, I sensed a siren_s song.*

Attractive as the innovative idea seems for an open-spaces building, it lures us into accepting the termination of Edmunds by obscuring the great need there for a neighborhood elementary school.

Edmunds was built only thirty years ago as a merger of Bird and Grant elementary schools. At the time it was surrounded by deteriorating once-grand houses converted to rental units. Edmunds was built at the perimeter of the largest public housing project in Iowa. The first signs of restoration of the old houses and the innovative design of the new school made Edmunds the embodiment of the promise and opportunity which public education offers.

Today, according to May 2005 District records, 363 resident students reside in our attendance area, but only 111 students are allowed to attend Edmunds. The Administration justifies this lock-out of neighborhood children with:

- ◆ the necessity to meet the district desegregation guidelines,
- ◆ the lack of *English as a Second Language* (ESL) instruction at Edmunds,
- ◆ and mandates of federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation.

Are we seriously to believe that these conditions are immutable? Are we so inflexible and hopeless that our only solution to correct current conditions is to close the doors of Edmunds and tear the building down? No, we have better brains among us, and we have a great advantage now in addition to a community of creative, innovative families living in brightly restored and renovated homes.

Our great advantage is that in our attendance area, we now

Please support our efforts to keep Des Moines Schools open and provide better education for our children.

SOS is 501.C6 non-profit, not a 501.C3, organization. Donations to the SOS legal fund are symbols of faith in public education and in our right to redress violations of our public trust through our U.S. judicial system.

**Make checks payable to
SOS Legal Fund, mail to;**

**Save Our Schools,
P.O. Box 1358,
Des Moines, Iowa 50305-1358.**

have a rainbow of children. If the doors of our neighborhood school — Edmunds— were flung open to all of these neighborhood children, the student body would quite literally be a mirror of our world today.

What better learning environment for life could we begin with than this?

We need only to bring intelligent people, experts in the various fields required: management, construction, education, psychology and urban planning. With determined planning we not only can change the perceived problems, we can create a wonderful working model for others to follow.

The Chinese symbol for crisis and opportunity are the same. Every crisis provides an important opportunity.

With Edmunds and the other threatened schools, we now have both. Our efforts in the very near future can not only save our schools and make them better, but also save our City.

A Sherman Hill Grandmother

DESCRIPTION OF DMPS CONTRACT WITH TAYLOR-OHDE-KITCHELL

TRANSCRIPTION: Personal Telephone Message of June 6, 2005, sent 10:20 A.M.

Xxxxxx left the contract for T-O-K, the program manager and the Schools-First progress report to the district oversight committee from Schools First and DMPS

They are rather lengthy documents. There is no way - I don't think —anyone could read and understand them before the meeting tonight. But what Xxxxx did mention was, the smoking gun —if there is one - is the Management Contract - and is the fact that TOK is paid an absorbent fee. Xxxxxx thought it was 26 million dollars, but he didn't remember specifically.

But in addition to that, all of T-O-K expenses are reimbursed. So all the salaries of Steve Lang and John Kerss and the people who go to all these school meetings are paid. Their expenses associated with those meetings, are paid. Apparently, their office space is paid for by the district. Then any incidental expenses are paid for. The management contract is gravy for TOK.

So they are laughing all the way to the bank. Now, the T-O-K contract is up for review and renewal on June 30th, 2006, and I suppose, unless things change . . .