

CREATING OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS



A Bold Plan to Transform
Indianapolis Public Schools



The Mind Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DECEMBER 2011

Great Schools Share a Set of Core Conditions that Enable Them to Help All Students Achieve

- * Schools have the freedom to build and manage their own teams, create their own culture, focus resources on student needs, and empower teachers to innovate in the classroom.
- * Schools are accountable for results. If they don't perform, they are closed.
- * As schools of choice, they empower parents and therefore have to effectively meet families' needs to stay open.

But IPS doesn't create these conditions for its schools:

- * Only 41 cents of every dollar goes to school budgets; the remainder is controlled by a large central administration.
- * Most principals have little say over who is on their team, limiting their ability to build the right school culture.
- * Most teachers are fed a top-down, standardized curriculum ... and a rigid formula decides how much they're paid.
- * Most schools aren't held meaningfully accountable by the district for improving student achievement.
- * Most students are stuck going to poor-performing neighborhood schools, with few high-quality transfer options and long waiting lists for successful magnet schools.

We must confront the truth: The system is broken. Much of the best work happens only when talented educators find a way to work around the bureaucracy.

The question: Can we reinvent IPS to ensure it creates the conditions for great schools to thrive? The answer: Yes!

But we need a bold new vision that focuses relentlessly on creating those conditions for success.

"Public education in the large urban areas in the United States has failed. This is a somewhat heretical thing for a schools Chancellor to say. But if we are not going to be candid, I don't think we can take the kind of steps we need to make the necessary changes."

— Former NYC Schools Chancellor Joel Klein

Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) Is Broken — with Catastrophic Results for Kids

ONLY 45% OF IPS STUDENTS MEET STATE STANDARDS ON THE MATH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS PORTIONS OF ISTEP+.

The achievement gap between IPS and the state in English language arts is large in 3rd grade — 20 percentage points — and even larger in 8th grade — 29 percentage points. Only 58% of students graduate on time. Six of the seven most chronically failing schools in the state are in IPS.

Generations of skilled leaders and educators have done their best to fix broken urban school systems in Indiana and around the country. Indianapolis has invested tens of millions of dollars in “reform.” Yet our kids are still stuck in a system that produces abysmal results.

IPS has made some recent progress in the past few years, but it still has not come close to meeting its 2010 goals. Even if IPS could sustain this progress, it would take many years — and in some cases decades — for the district to reach those benchmarks.

It would be one thing if it were impossible to deliver excellent education to urban, high-poverty students. But a growing number of schools — in Indianapolis and around the country — are achieving remarkable success with students just like ours.

IPS IS MAKING PROGRESS, BUT STILL FALLS WELL SHORT OF ITS GOALS AND STATE AVERAGE

METRIC	JURISDICTION	STARTING BENCHMARK (2004-05)	2009-10 GOAL	2010-11 RESULT	ADDITIONAL YEARS NEEDED TO REACH 2009-10 GOAL AT CURRENT RATE
Graduation rates	IPS	51%*	95%	58%**	21.1
	Indiana	77%	—	85%**	
Academic Honors Diploma (% of grads)	IPS	10%	25%	12%**	32.5
	Indiana	31%	—	31%**	
Language arts ISTEP+ pass rates	IPS	47%	73%	56%	11.3
	Indiana	71%	—	79%	
Math ISTEP+ pass rates	IPS	47%	72%	58%	7.6
	Indiana	72%	—	80%	

*Graduation rates not available for 2004–05, so table uses 2005–06 graduation rates instead.

**2010–11 graduation rates and distribution of diploma types not available, so table uses 2009–10 data instead.

Note: See full report, Figure 2-5, for data sources and methodology.

Creating the Conditions for Success

To create the conditions for great schools to thrive, we must reinvent how IPS operates. Instead of the central administration making all the important decisions from the top down, we recommend that IPS:

- * **Shift the majority of funding control from the central office to schools** — sending \$188 million more a year to schools (\$12,000 per student vs. today's \$6,600).
- * **Pay for all 4-year-olds to attend a quality prekindergarten program** so they can start building the skills they need to be successful students.
- * **Give schools with skilled leadership teams control** over staffing, budgets, culture, curriculum, and services — as long as their schools meet and sustain high performance goals.
- * **Invest up to \$10 million a year** to attract the next generation of great principals and teachers ... and start great new schools.
- * **Empower parents with many more good choices** — in neighborhood schools or across the city if that's what would best serve the individual needs of their children.
- * **Give great teachers more say** in what gets taught and how — and pay them more for achieving great results.
- * **Invest in a major effort to turn around struggling schools** — and replace chronically failing programs with schools we know can succeed.
- * **Unite all public schools** (traditional district, magnet, and public charters) under a single banner of quality: Opportunity Schools.

We call them **OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS** because that's exactly what they offer: a unique opportunity to transform IPS, the lives of our children, and our city's future.

We could do all of this with current funding ... without raising taxes one cent.

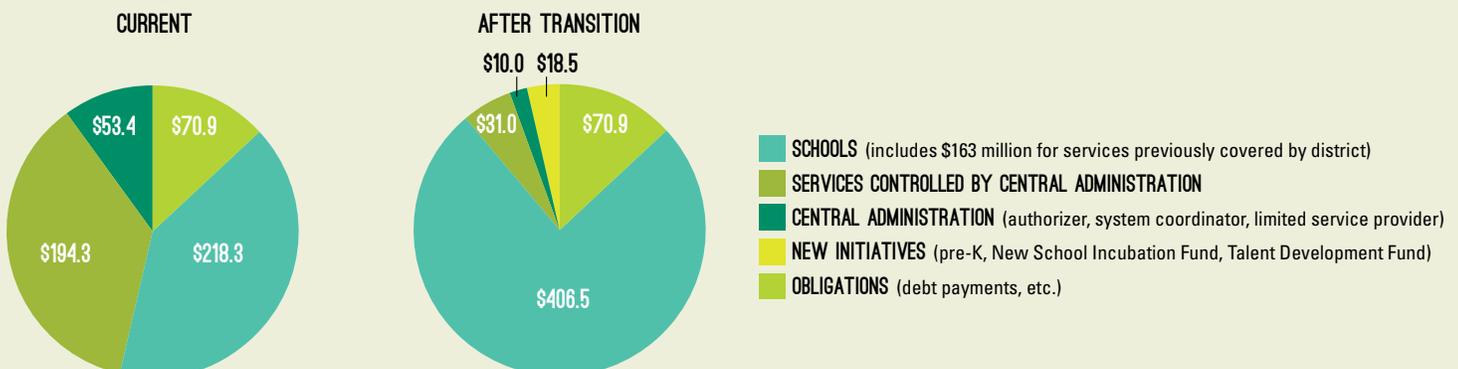
WHAT IS AN OPPORTUNITY SCHOOL?

Today's public school landscape is confusing; the labels "traditional district," "magnet," and "charter" schools don't mean much to the public and none connotes quality. They are legal designations. **By creating a unified designation for all high-quality public schools within the IPS boundaries, we would be sending a strong signal that the only thing that matters is educational excellence — no matter what kind of school it is.**

Opportunity Schools would be given unprecedented freedom over staffing, budgets, culture, and curriculum, as long as they continue to meet very high standards. Over time, all schools in IPS would become Opportunity Schools. Excellent existing schools would become Opportunity Schools immediately following a planning year. Poor performing schools would be given support to improve and seek Opportunity status. And new leadership and new school models would replace persistently failing programs.

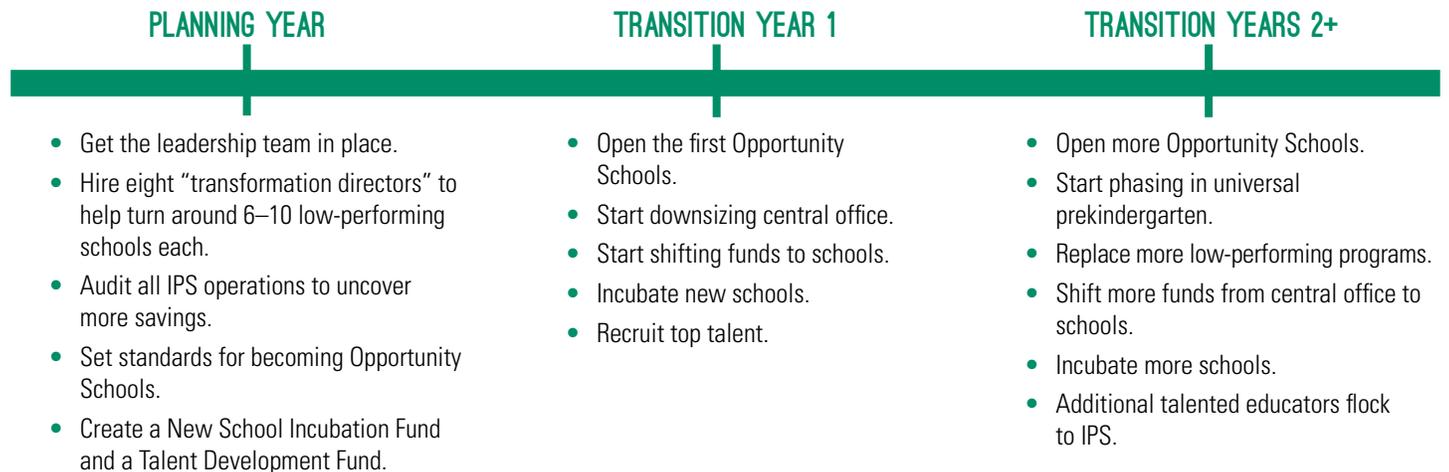
INVESTING STRATEGICALLY IN SCHOOLS AND TOP PRIORITIES — WITH CURRENT RESOURCES

In millions of dollars



We Need a Careful Transition

Sweeping changes such as these will not happen overnight. We believe IPS can open about 10 great new Opportunity Schools a year to replace failing programs. Many likely will be home-grown. But our reforms also will make IPS a national magnet for the most talented teachers, principals, and programs in the nation, which will accelerate our progress.



Dividing Responsibilities Strategically

OPPORTUNITY SCHOOLS

- * Establish a clear, focused mission.
- * Create a culture of excellence.
- * Hire and fire staff.
- * Pay excellent teachers more to attract and retain them.
- * Control budgets.
- * Customize curriculum and instruction to meet students’ needs.
- * Add extra learning time, if needed.
- * Select programs and partners.
- * Keep students safe.
- * Involve families and communities.
- * Decide how to handle key operations (HR, IT, food service, etc.): in house, buy from central administration, or buy from outside suppliers.

NEW IPS CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION

- * Authorize new Opportunity Schools.
- * Monitor and hold all IPS schools accountable.
- * Hire transformation directors to help turn around struggling schools.
- * Conduct citywide choice/enrollment process and expand parent outreach.
- * Manage funds to start new schools, attract new talent, and pay for prekindergarten.
- * Oversee special education.
- * Fulfill obligations (debt and bond payments, etc.).
- * Manage transportation and facilities during transition; after transition, schools control.

Mayoral Accountability: The Best Way Forward

The status quo won't get us there. Urban school boards nationwide are struggling to govern well. For decades, many IPS boards have promised reforms but have not delivered.

It's not the people. It's the broken system that makes it nearly impossible to execute the bold transformation we need.

To make strong leadership possible, our best hope is to make the Indianapolis Mayor accountable for public education in IPS. We propose a new board with five members, three appointed by the mayor and two by the City-County Council. Other cities using this approach have seen many advantages:

- * A single point of accountability for schools;
- * Reduced influence of narrow special interests;
- * More funding for instruction, less for general administration and debt; and
- * Coordinated city services to support students and families.

Mayoral accountability is not perfect. No governance system is. But it's much better than the alternatives: perpetuating a failed status quo with the current school board or risking a total state takeover.

Why We Will Succeed

Indianapolis is as well positioned as any city in the country to implement this bold vision. First and foremost, we have a remarkable legacy of civic engagement, community pride, and transformational accomplishments. With groups such as Teach For America, The New Teacher Project's Indianapolis Teaching Fellows, the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship, and Teach Plus in place, we have access to a new generation of top teaching talent and school leadership. With The Mind Trust's Education Entrepreneur Fellowship and Charter School Incubator, we are attracting the next generation of education innovators and best-in-class public charter school networks.

Now the challenge — and opportunity — is even greater: creating great schools in every single neighborhood. Given all of our assets, there's no reason why IPS cannot become a national model of educational excellence.

It's time for our community to engage in a serious conversation about creating the conditions inside IPS that will allow talented teachers and school leaders to thrive. We are confident this plan provides a blueprint. We look forward to the discussion.

"Mayoral control also clearly defines accountability. One person is in charge. If the schools succeed, the mayor gets the credit. If they don't, the mayor takes the blame. In districts run by boards, the accountability isn't as clear."

— U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

EVERYONE BENEFITS

Students: Better prepared for college, careers, life ... with higher earnings, lower incarceration rates, better health, and more voting and volunteering.

Teachers: More say on instruction, more opportunities to start their own schools, and potential for higher pay.

Principals: Much less red tape and the freedom to lead their schools.

Parents: Many more quality school choices.

All Citizens: Stronger community, higher property values, and more taxpayer accountability.

Copies of the complete plan, together with all sources of research, analyses, and data, are available at www.TheMindTrust.org/OpportunitySchools. Questions: opportunitieschools@themindtrust.org or 317-500-4260.



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