

Arlington High School Community Meeting: When Will the Experiments Stop?

By Shawnta S. Barnes – August 30, 2017



In July, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) held meetings at Broad Ripple and John Marshall, schools recommended by the district to be closed at the end of this school year, to hear public comment about their recommendations. This month, the district scheduled two more meetings at Arlington High School and Northwest High Schools, schools the district has recommended to restart as middle schools

next school year. Yesterday evening, on Tuesday, August 29th, a meeting was held at Arlington for the public to share its views on the possible conversion of the school and the district's high school reinvention plan.

Although comments were shared for and against the switch to middle school and for and against the high school reinvention plan, what was clear people were frustrated with the many changes Arlington has been through. By 2012, Arlington had been rated an F school for six consecutive years which led to state takeover. Successful charter operator Tindley Accelerated Schools was hired by the state and tasked with turning the school around. In 2015, Arlington returned to IPS; Tindley requested extra funds to operate the school, but this request was denied. Although Tindley signed a five year contract, the agreement was ended. Although Arlington has returned to IPS, it is still under state intervention as the grade has not changed from an F. It is part of the district's transformation zone where it receives extra support and guidance from Mass Insight Education. Many commenters mentioned they were tired of Arlington being an experiment and that the Arlington community is invested and wants to continue to lend a hand to improve the school.

Below are some of the comments shared last night. Some comments have been shortened and edited for clarity.

For the last few years, Arlington has endured more challenges than any other IPS high school in this district without success, without much support from this administration. Three years ago, you gave Principal Stan Law and staff 45 days to get this school prepared for the 2015-16 school year. When the school opened, they were understaffed, the athletic teams had no uniforms, but somehow, as a community, we all came together to make significant progress. These decisions that you're making unfortunately affects many of our poor whites and our black and brown students of color. It frustrates me that many of you that sit on this board send your own children to private schools because you don't believe in this system. It also frustrates me to see John Marshall students attend Arlington this year, who may now have to attend three high schools in three years. Where is the consistency in these communities? Many of you on this board would be outraged if your children have to go through what these students go through every day. When the new justice system is finished the cost is expected to be worth \$571 million. Your proposal is to save \$4 million a year closing schools. How is it that more money is being invested in our

justice system instead of our education system? Why not support financially on the front end with education instead of the back end with jails and prisons? A child's race, their economic background, zip code they live should never determine their educational destiny.

Walker Foundation

Without Arlington staying open as a high school, many students will miss out on the opportunity of a scholarship from the Walker Scholarship Foundation. This past year alone 24 students qualified for a scholarship. They may be the first in their families to attend college. We ask you to keep Arlington open as a high school so students can have the opportunity to experience a debt free education after high school.

Arlington Alum

A great program that was just brought back to Arlington High School was JROTC. I was in this program for four years. These are the type of programs that bring discipline to children. Not only does it bring discipline, but it brings livelihood. When I say livelihood, I was able to go to the service, did 4 ½ years in United States Marine Corps with honorable discharge during the Gulf War. It saddens me to look back on how our high school has now changed and it has changed because the very popular programs that made it what it was are no longer here.

IPS parent

I would like to say I am a proud supporter of IPS. Children should go to a school that is near their home. I also feel that IPS schools must step it up and provide our children the best. I looked at the programs IPS currently offers. There's a graduation rate of 91% for students who are in college and career programs compared to the 77% graduation rate of general studies. Obviously something is working with these programs and if the result is graduation, then the college and career academies are doing a better job. Why wouldn't we want all students to have access to these programs? Our kids deserve the best education available. We need programs like this to bring students back to IPS. People are willing to send their kids to other schools around town because they feel those schools are doing a better job. It's time for us to be the best; I support IPS' plan.

Dountonia Batts, IPS Community Coalition

The reinvent IPS proposal is proving to not be the right first choice for IPS students. The IPS Community Coalition are asking that you delay the vote, find ways to keep cuts away from the classrooms, and more at the central office level and to replicate programs that are working in the non-choice schools like the replication plan to open more schools on the north side of town. All students should have the resources necessary for high quality education, but some students need more to get there such as smaller class size, mentors, access to exceptional teachers and the school needs the funding to provide them the education they need to succeed, but this is common knowledge among most educators.

Dr. Jim Scheurich, IUPUI Professor

I spent over 20 years studying urban school districts. Making the decision to close Arlington High School, the school board is not considering the impact that this decision has on the individual girls and boys and their families and their communities. They are not thinking about how they might be hurting children. Some of our children will drop out. Some will not recover from losing support from systems that have been built for them at Arlington. Some will never recover from losing those teachers who really know them and really care about them. Some will leave IPS. Is this worth \$9 million? We all know we could find \$9 million in other budgetary savings. If they really wanted to maintain our current high schools, they could have found other cost effective savings. For example, they could have found other agencies and organizations to share these buildings, but they did not even try. At the same time, they were strongly supporting the opening of new charter high schools. What is the game plan here -closing Arlington and thus hurting the families, students and community while supporting more charter high schools? Clearly, this school board is not dedicated to helping our children, families and communities. Who are they really working for? We do have some strong evidence of this. Over the last three school board elections, The Mind Trust and Stand for Children have spent over \$1.5 million controlling who gets elected on the school board. Wealthy conservative white people from Indiana and from around the country contributed over \$1.5 million to buy the election of the Indianapolis Public Schools Board. Thus when the school board ignores the clear fact that the community does not want to close the schools, which has been demonstrated in multiple school meetings, we know who they are obeying.

David Worland, Principal Cathedral High School

I am very proud of the partnership Cathedral has formed with Arlington High School. One of our events we share is Unity Day back in August of 2016. During this joyful gathering, Arlington visited Cathedral and enjoyed an afternoon of food, fellowship, and friends. The purpose of the day is to unite Arlington and Cathedral and make a positive impact on both schools as well as the broader community. This past spring, the Arlington English department hosted the Cathedral English department to watch the powerful movie Fences together. Both Cathedral and Arlington read the book and came together to watch the movie right here in your auditorium. After reading the book and watching the movie, both schools had a very moving and powerful discussion. Cathedral hosted Arlington on its Day of Service. On this day, we asked the students of both schools to give thoughts about our relationship and responses from them were incredible. The students felt we should continue to unite in the future and Cathedral and Arlington students want and value this relationship just as much as the teachers and administrators. Cathedral wants you to know we are proud members of the east side community. For the last couple of years, Arlington has been an active participant in joining our efforts to strengthen and improve our community. It is in the spirit of unity that we would like to continue our relationship with Arlington High School.

IPS parent

I'm a mother of three children currently enrolled in the IPS school system, two attend CFI and one Purdue Polytechnic. I have also worked at Arsenal Tech High School. I am here tonight to offer my support for the IPS high school plan and I believe that these schools can offer our kids a focus and a foundation that allows them to prepare for a career they would like to pursue after graduation.

As was shared at the meeting yesterday, Arlington has faced a rocky past, but I would like it to have a bright future. While I was in first grade at IPS Washington Irving school #14, my parents moved into a house, where they currently reside today, in the Arlington High School boundary. The street we moved to was part of the desegregation busing and I was bused from 2nd-12th grade to Lawrence Township and I graduated from Lawrence North High School. The next street over, my friends attended IPS schools and attended Arlington High School. The busing caused some of the families to leave and move closer to the schools in Lawrence

Township. Since busing ended, where my parents reside, is now back part of the IPS boundary. Some families, like my parents and some of my friends, did not leave. I still consider this my community and I'm in this community every Sunday when I visit my parents after church. Whatever future lies ahead for Arlington, I hope it is in the best interest of the students and causes this community to thrive like it once did.

On September 18, 2017, the Board of School Commissioners for Indianapolis Public Schools will decide whether to accept or reject the school closure recommendations and high school reinvention plan. Click [here](#) to sign up to give public comment during the last meeting at Northwest High School at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, August 31.