

Departing IPS Teacher Leader Answers Your Questions

By [Shawnta S. Barnes](#) - [June 27, 2018](#)



On Saturday, June 23, 2018, my *Indy/Ed* piece “Why This IPS Teacher Leader is Leaving IPS” was published. In less than 48 hours, it had 6,500 views and I was flooded with messages. As of last evening, it had almost 9,000. I love responding to reader comments and private messages. Reader comments help me consider different perspectives or another angle to cover and feedback also lets me know when I need to continue a story. The next piece I had planned to write about my professional journey was about what I was doing next. That will come later. After spending hours responding to concerns and questions, I felt it was best to write a follow-up piece.

In case you misunderstood...

If it was not clear from my first piece, I want it to be abundantly clear before I continue, I do not hold any ill will for Indianapolis Public Schools and I genuinely want the district to continue to improve for the sake of my relatives and the other children in our city that attend a school in IPS. I told one person who commented on my piece online this, “I think more people need to be transparent about their journey in education. I hope my transparency is helpful to others. We can’t improve the education profession through silence.” It is in this vein that I have decided to publicly answer questions I was asked.

Who is reaching out to you and/or viewing your piece?

When it came down to public comments I haven’t seen any from current IPS employees; however, I heard from a lot of them privately as well as some former employees. I have heard from administrators and teachers across Indiana and from different states, IPS residents, community organizations, community members, and people who write for other education publications.

Have you spoken to any district-level employees, such as Dr. Ferebee the Superintendent of IPS or the school board?

During the course of my career in IPS, some district-level employees have told me they read what I write and the district has always been well aware that I’m an education writer. I have not, as of this publication, heard from any district-level employees or school board members about my previous piece,

but I would be more than happy to speak with them about it. If given the chance, I would share information I didn't write about and elaborate on what I did write.

Are you not grateful that you were able to earn additional money the entire time you were in the district?

Yes, I am grateful, but stipends are a one time deal. This means you have to apply for an opportunity to earn another one each year. It is not a permanent pay increase. Also, stipends sometimes come with fine print. My first and second teacher leader stipend was prorated. You are paid the teacher leader stipends in increments throughout the year on your paycheck. My first year as a teacher leader, we learned our stipends were prorated after a teacher leader in my program realized the money wasn't going to add up to \$5,000. After she reached out to HR, we were all told they prorated our stipends because our teacher leader program did not begin at the beginning of the school year.

Teacher leader opportunities require more work for the extra pay and I was up to the task, but the reality is I could just be a regular teacher in a neighboring school district and make more money doing one job than having to take on extra responsibilities to earn extra pay temporarily.

How is it okay that you were paid an \$11,000 stipend last year and no one was really checking on you?

This was a frequently asked question, especially from IPS residents. Residents who have talked to me about the upcoming referendum vote are on the fence about voting yes. I haven't talked to one person who doesn't want IPS students to have the appropriate resources, but many of them don't understand how resources are currently being used or they believe current resources are not being managed correctly. When some residents read a teacher leader job was created at the high school for the 2017-18 school year that paid me an additional \$11,000 and then it was determined the job would only exist for one year, many people asked, "What was the point of even creating the job and wasting that \$11,000?" They also had concerns, as well as many other readers, about why my school

administration only evaluated me once at the beginning of the school year back in September and didn't during the rest of the year.

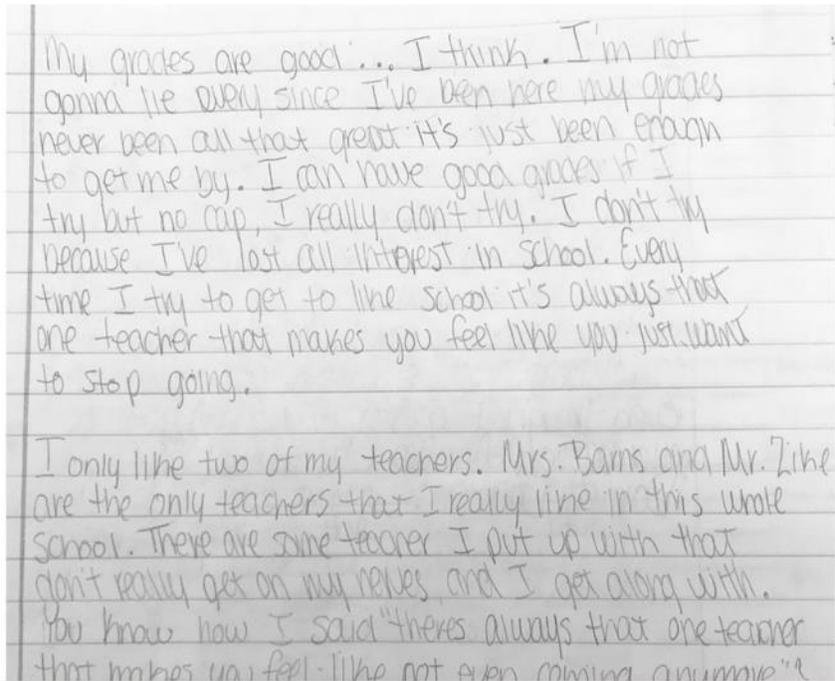
I will be the first to say that I agree this is problematic. It makes no sense to create a job for one year, nor is it okay to pay a person extra money and not monitor what the person is doing. Several people pointed out that I could have been doing nothing or showing movies since no one was visiting my classroom. I assure you this wasn't the case and you can speak to any of my students or read some of their comments below about me.



Thank you Mrs. Barnes I'm really going to miss you. Enjoy your summer

Wed, Jun 6, 8:22 AM

I really enjoyed Mrs. Barnes class. This class helped you even when you didn't want it. This class showed you that not everyone is what they seem and that you should get to know the people in your class. This class helped me with my reading and showed me that I need to practice reading more often and try to get better with it.



This course alone, and my teacher Mrs. Barnes has influenced me not to keep my feelings and thoughts in, but to express them on paper because the effect of not expressing myself and holding everything in makes me angry for the simple fact that I assume people know what I am feeling, just based off of my facial expressions. Although I might not show that I am grateful for my teachers, but deep down they are the highlight of my future as they played a part in helping me create it.

Every school employee, every student, and every family that is part of a school district is a walking advertisement for the school district. Although I do believe IPS is doing a better job marketing and advertising the district and lifting up all the good the district is doing, the biggest issue that is holding IPS back is the negative experiences people share about the district. Although I didn't write my previous piece to discourage people from voting for the referendum, I do understand why people are concerned about the lack of

monitoring I had when receiving an additional \$11,000 and how this feeds into the story of distrust they already had about the district.

Is it common for teachers to not be evaluated the mandated number of times by their school district?

This question or a version of it was asked by a lot of people especially those outside of education. One person I spoke to on the phone explained that every job regardless of the profession requires a supervisor to evaluate you and this person wondered how a supervisor could get away with not doing part of his or her job.

If you are a teacher who truly cares about improving your practice as an educator, you want an evaluation and you want feedback to improve. If you speak to educators, many of them feel like administrators see evaluations as an item on their to-do list and not as a tool to help teachers improve.

I just wrapped up my 12th year as an educator and three of those years were in IPS, which means I have taught somewhere else. IPS is the first place where I have taught where I didn't have all of my evaluations completed. I had a difficult pregnancy during my fifth year as an educator in another district. I had to go on bedrest for four months and then I was on maternity leave. During that school year, I only worked from August-October. How is it that my administration in another district visited me more times when I only worked three months than last year when I worked ten months in IPS?

I can't speak to how common it is for teachers to not be evaluated because I don't have the data, but I do believe all school districts should be aware of if their principals are completing evaluations or not and then they should take action to fix the situation if that is not the case. Teachers are put on plans and even fired for not doing essential components of their jobs. Why should principals not be held to the same standard?

What happens to teachers when they do not have the number of evaluations they are supposed to have?

Because last year was my first year, where I realized this was going to be the case, I actually looked into this. I talked to a few union representatives and teachers who had been teaching longer than me. I was told that if the evaluations did not happen, I would not be penalized, and my evaluation would be finalized the following school year.

For non-education people, evaluations are finalized the following school year because we have to wait on the standardized test data and in Indiana, school districts receive this data after the school year concludes. What normally happens, and what I have experienced with my first IPS principal and principals from other districts, is you have a final conference with your administrator at the end of the year to review your evaluation and areas of improvement for the next school year. The following school year, the evaluation is finalized and you receive your final rating of highly effective, effective, needs improvement, or ineffective. If you are rated highly effective or effective, and your district has not frozen salaries, your raise then goes into effect and then you are retro paid the difference between your new salary and the previous salary you were paid up until your rating was finalized.

Did you consider working at an IPS Innovation School?

Yes, I considered working at an innovation school. An innovation school is a school that is run by an independent school operator that partners with the school district. The school could be a current IPS school that elects to go innovation like Thomas Gregg, an IPS school that is restarted and forced to go innovation like Washington Irving, or is an existing charter school that joins the network like Avondale Meadows.

I am pro-choice when it comes to schools, not to be confused with pro-charter. I am for private, parochial, independent, traditional public, public charter, homeschool, etc. as long as the school is producing results. There are schools in all of these categories that fail students and there are also schools in all of those categories that produce great results. I have worked for a charter school before and it was a good experience.

Even though I did consider it, in the end, an innovation school wasn't the right choice at this time. I chose to interview with three innovation schools and one potential innovation school. The potential innovation school wanted to hire me as an administrator (in case you were wondering I do have an admin license), but the school left the innovation process. What was unfortunate is I heard about this school backing out from other people before I heard from them directly. I only heard from them once I reached out to find out what was going on. Two of the innovation schools, I never heard back from after doing more than one round of interviews with them. One innovation school created a position for me that didn't currently exist at the school, but after some unexpected changes at the school, I decided I needed to find another opportunity.

Other innovation schools (that I did not apply to) reached out to me for an interview, but I responded back and declined. When you are displaced from your school, the district reminds you that you are not employed by the school, but by the district. Furthermore, they assure you that as long as there's a vacancy in a school where you possess the appropriate license, you will have a job.

So, I was surprised when I started receiving job interview requests from innovation schools where they stated in the email they got access to my name from IPS. To work for an IPS innovation school, you have to resign from IPS and switch your employment to that school operator. I don't understand why an employer would let another employer know you don't have a job placement. In one breath the district tells you that you are guaranteed a job by the district and in another breath, they give your name to another employer.

Below are excerpts from a few emails I received from a few innovation schools. *(Note: I edited out information that could potentially identify the school.)*

Your name was listed on the IPS displaced list. We are looking for great teachers. We would love to interview some great teachers with some IPS experience. We offer a great school climate with

highly supportive administration. We offer competitive compensation. Please check out our website.

I came across your name on the IPS displaced list and I am excited to speak with you about a role at our school because I think you could have what it takes to be a leader in our network.

We are currently looking to fill a position for the 2018-19 school year, and we received your information from an IPS staffing email. Here is our school website if you would like to learn a little more about us.

Not only did they receive my name but I'm guessing these schools had access to my resume or teaching license too because they reached out to me about positions that matched my certifications.

After IPS decided it was going from seven high school campuses to four and required all high school employees to reapply for their jobs or another high school job, why didn't you interview for the Reading Specialist position to stay at your school and in the district?

Yes, we had the opportunity to interview for jobs at our current high school or another high school, but the Reading Specialist position was a recently created position and it was not an option at the time of those interviews. I have five licenses, so when we had to identify the positions we were interested in, I was told by human resources, I had to rank my certifications and then I would be informed what I was interviewing for. I interviewed for an English as a New Language (ENL) position at my school and I was expecting not to get the job. Although I had been an ENL teacher previously, the ENL teachers at the high school where I worked were awesome so I didn't expect to be chosen over them nor was I.

As a displaced educator, was IPS human resources helpful?

I have been displaced twice, back to back. Human resources initially did not realize I was displaced the first time my position was eliminated. When I called to get information, an HR lady told me I wasn't displaced. After I explained that my principal eliminated my position and directed her talk to

him, she realized I was actually displaced. I informed another displaced academic coach I knew about how I wasn't on the displaced list initially and told her to make sure she was. She later shared with me she wasn't initially on the list either nor were two other academic coaches she knew.

When I ended up being displaced the second time, it was a much smoother process. First off, I was on the list, which meant I received all of the communication from human resources for displaced staff. They sent about three emails a month to keep us updated on the process and they quickly responded to any emails I sent or phone messages I left.

Did you go to the job fair for displaced staff and did you find it helpful?

The first time I was displaced, I did not go to the displacement fair, but the second time I was displaced I did. The initial displacement fair during the 2017-18 school year took place at my high school. The day of the fair was the same day I took personal time to give testimony at the statehouse in favor of House Bill 1421 School Discipline. I waited for hours to speak and when I finally spoke, it was 4:30 PM. After having brief conversations with people who were in the statehouse, walking back to my car, and driving through crazy downtown traffic, I arrived at the job fair after it started. I wasn't worried. The fair was from 5-8 PM and I had only arrived about 30 minutes after it began.

Before the job fair, human resources sent out a list of all of the vacancies. I printed the list and highlighted positions that I had interest. When I arrived there were empty tables. I'm not sure if those schools didn't come to the job fair or just left shortly after it began. I was disappointed because I planned to visit two of those vacant tables. I even stopped by my school's table to find out if any position was going to be created to replace my eliminated position since that is what happened at my previous school when my position was eliminated. When I went to the table, administration told me this wasn't a good time and that they were leaving the fair.

As I was standing in line to speak to administrators of different schools, some educators were complaining about how some schools were not at the job fair. That didn't bother me. I do realize it does send a message, but at the end

of the day, I rather you not come to the job fair and pretend like you are interested in hiring me, and you are really not.

I did end up with an interview at a highly coveted magnet school from attending the fair. I was offered a job, but I declined the offer.

Why did you decline the job at the IPS magnet school?

I determined it wasn't a good fit for me.

Did you quit K-12 education?

No. Several people read my piece as a goodbye to K-12. I'm not going to lie; I did consider taking a break from K-12. Research shows that many educators quit by year five and I have stayed in education more than twice as long. I appreciate those of you that sent me job opportunities or told me you would love to have me work at your school. I even had an out of state request. I have a new opportunity where I going to do something I haven't done before and I will write about that in my next piece about my professional journey.

Did you really love IPS?

This question, I was asked by a few people, is in reference to my picture being on the website teachips.org (I sure it will be coming down soon now that I have resigned). The district asked for positive stories and I love bragging about my students and my classroom. I completed the form, which also asked you to submit a picture. I thought the information I provided would be used in a newsletter. I didn't know my picture and a quote I gave would be put on this website. I was actually informed about it from another IPS employee who found it interesting that my picture and another IPS employee's picture was on the website under the heading "Why Teachers Love IPS" when both of us were displaced and didn't have job placement at

Why Teachers Love IPS



"The best part about my classroom is the community and culture of respect we have."

Shawnta Barnes

Ready to apply? Let's get started!

worried about any negative ramifications because I was so honest. I get where people are coming from, but why do people care more about fitting in and suppressing their truth than sharing their story to help others? No journey is perfect and I don't regret working in IPS and never will. The best we can do with our journey is learn from it and share it with others in hopes that other people will learn some knowledge that will help them on their journey.

the time of the launching of this new website that was created to attract teachers to the district. Even though I didn't know I was going to be on the website, if my picture and/or quote helped attract talent to the district especially teachers of color, then I'm okay with that.

I did not love being displaced twice in IPS. Had my first position not been cut, I would still be at my first IPS school and had my next position not been cut, I would have stayed at my last school. After being at two IPS schools and having three different job titles, I simply left for stability in hopes of finding a role where I could stay in the same position for more than one year. I loved the opportunities I had, the students and families I reached, the educators I met, and the friendships I now have from being in the district.

Final Thoughts

I was asked several times if I was